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THE OTHER TWO GUESTS ARE STILL SEATED AT THE TABLE, HEAD AND FOOT—FACING ONE ANOTHER. AND, OH, GOD, SUCH GUESTS!

The Specter Barque; A TALE OF THE PACIFIC.

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AUTHOR OF "THE HEADLESS HORSEMAN," "THE DEATH-SHOT," "THE SCALP HUNTERS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. THE CHASE.

In mid-ocean—the Pacific.
Two ships within sight of one another, less than a league apart. Both are sailing before the wind, running dead down it. Not side by side, but one in the wake of the other.
Both have full canvas spread, even to sky and studding-sails.
Is it a chase?
To all appearances it is. A probability strengthened by the relative size and character of the ships. One is a barque, polacca-masted, her masts raking back with the acute shark's-fin set supposed to be characteristic of the pirate.
The other is a ship, three-masted and full-sized, a row of real, not painted ports, with a gun grinning out of each, proclaiming her a man-of-war.
The flag at her peak is one known all over the world—the "Stars and Stripes."
The polacca also carries a flag; but one whose nationality can not be so easily determined. Still is it the ensign of a naval power, though one of little

note. The five-pointed white star, solitary in a blue field, proclaims it the national colors of Chili.
Why should an American frigate be chasing a Chilean barque? There is no war between the great Republic of the North and her Southern sister; but peace treaties and relations of the most amicable kind. Were the polacca flying a flag of blood-red, or black with death's-head and cross-bones, the chase would be intelligible. But the bit of bunting at her mast-head shows nothing on its field either of menace or defiance. On the contrary, it appeals to pity, and asks for aid.
For it is an ensign reversed—in short, a signal of distress.
And yet the ship showing this signal is scudding before a stiff breeze, with all sails set, stays taut, not a rope out of place!
It is a sight common at sea: a ship showing signals of distress. But that such should be carrying all sail, running away, or attempting to run away, from another ship making to relieve her—above all from a frigate bearing the American flag—this is strange.
And this the barque has been, still is doing. Sailing on down the wind, without slackening halyards, or lessening her spread of canvas by a single inch!
Certainly her behavior is unaccountable. At least so think the commander of the vessel of war and his officers and men, for, in running down the Pacific, they have met and spoken several vessels, some of which reported this same barque; or, at all events, one answering her description—polacca-masted, all sails set, and showing signals of distress.
A British brig, which the frigate's boat had boarded, said that such a barque had run across her bows, so close they could have thrown a rope to her; that, at first, no one was seen aboard this barque, but, on being hailed, two men made their appear-

ance, both springing up to the main-shrouds, and then answering the hail in a language altogether unintelligible, and with hoarse, croaking voices, that resembled the barking of muzzled mastiffs.
It was late twilight when this occurred, nearly night; but the brig's people could distinguish the figures of the two men, as they stood upon the ratlines. And what surprised them even more than the odd speech, was that both appeared to be clothed in skin-dresses, covering them all over from head to foot!
The brig, seeing the signal of distress, would have sent a boat aboard; but the barque gave her no chance, running on without slackening sail, or showing any other sign of a wish to communicate.
Standing by itself, the tale of the brig's crew might have been taken for a sailor's yarn; and as they admitted it to be "nearly night," the obscurity would account for the skin-clothing. But, coupled with the report of another vessel the frigate had spoken, a whaler, even this seemed to receive corroboration.
The words that came through the whaler's trumpet were:
"Barque sighted, latitude 10:22 S., longitude 95 W. Polacca-masted. All sail set. Ensign reversed. Chilean. Men seen on board covered with red hair, supposed skin-dresses. Tried to come up, but could not. Barque a fast sailer—went away down the wind."
Already in receipt of such strange intelligence, no wonder at the frigate's crew feeling something more than mere surprise at the sight of a vessel, corresponding to that about which the tale has been told. For they are now near enough the barque to see that she answers the description given: "polacca-masted—all sail set—ensign reversed—Chilian."

And her behavior is as reported: "sailing away from those who answer her appealing signal, to all appearance endeavoring to shun them!"

Only now has the chase in reality commenced. Hitherto the frigate was but keeping her own course. But the signal of distress, just sighted through the telescope, has drawn her on; and, with canvas crowded, she steers straight for the polacca.

The latter is unquestionably a fast sailer; but, although too swift for the whaler, she is not a match for the man-of-war, but the chase is likely to be a long one.

As it continues, and the distance does not seem very much, or very rapidly diminishing, the frigate's crew begin to doubt whether that craft will ever be overhauled or overtaken. On the fore-deck sailors stand in groups, mingled with marines, their eyes bent upon the retreating barque, pronouncing their comments in muttering tones, and with brows overcast.

A fancy has sprung up around the fore-castle, that the chased ship is no ship at all, but a specter!

This fancy is gradually growing into a belief, faster as they draw nearer, and with naked eye note her correspondence with the reports of the spoken vessels.

They have not yet seen the skin-clad men—if men they be. About this there are doubts, fancies, fears. More like, say some of the more superstitious, they will prove to be specters!

The captain, surrounded by his officers, stands glass in hand gazing at the sail ahead. The frigate, though a fine war-vessel, is not one of the fastest sailers, else she might ere this have lapped upon the polacca. Still, has she been gradually gaining, and is now less than a league astern.

But the breeze has been also gradually declining, which is against her; and for the last hour she has rather lost than gained.

To compensate for this, she has let out studding-sails on all her yards, even to the royals; and again makes promise soon to bring the chase to a termination.

But again is there disappointment. In five minutes after, the frigate's sails are flapping against the masts, and her flag hangs half-folded.

In five more the sails only show motion by an occasional clout; while the flag droops dead downward.

And in ten minutes the huge war-ship, despite her spread canvas, lies motionless—the sea around her smooth as a swan-pond!

CHAPTER II.

BECALMED.

A CALM coming so suddenly just at a crisis when there were hopes of the frigate overtaking the chased vessel—what can this mean? Old sailors shake their heads, and refuse to make answer; while young ones, less cautious of speech, boldly pronounce the bark a specter! The legends of the Phantom Ship and Flying Dutchman circulate from lip to lip, as they stand straining their eyes after the still receding vessel, for clearly is she sailing on, with waves rippling around her!

"As I told ye, mates," says an old tar, "we'd never catch up with that craft—not if we stood after her till doomsday. And doomsday it might be for us, if we did."

"I hope she'll keep on, and leave us a good spell to leeward," rejoins a second. "It's a foolish thing followin' her; and, for my part, I hope we won't catch up with her."

"You need have no fear about that," says the first speaker. "Just look at her! She's making way yet! I believe she can sail as well without wind as with it."

Scarce are the words spoken, when, as if to contradict them, the sails of the polacca commence clouting against the masts; while her flag, hitherto spread, becomes no longer distinguishable as a signal of distress. The breeze that has failed the frigate is now also dead around the barque; and she too lies becalmed.

"What do you make her out, Mr. Black?" asks the captain of his first lieutenant, as both stand with leveled glasses.

"Not anything, sir," replies the lieutenant; "except that she shows the Chilian ensign reversed. I can't see face or figure of man aboard of her. Just now I noticed something over the taffrail that looked like a head. But it ducked suddenly, and has not shown again."

A short silence succeeds, the officers busied with their binoculars, endeavoring to catch sight of the head spoken of.

The frigate's commander at length speaks:

"Well, gentlemen, I must say this is singular. In all my experience at sea, I don't remember having met anything like it. What trick the Chilian barque—if she be Chilian—is up to, I can't guess, for the life of me. It cannot be a case of privateering or piracy. The thing has no guns; and if she had, she appears to have no men to handle them. It's a riddle all round; and to get the reading of it, I suppose we'll have to send a boat to her."

"I don't think we'll get a very willing crew, sir," says the first lieutenant, suggestively. "The men forward are quite superstitious about the chase; and think she may prove to be either the Phantom Ship or Flying Dutchman. When the boatswain pipes for a boat's crew, I fancy some of them will feel as if his whistle was a signal for them to walk the plank."

The remark causes the captain to smile, along with the other officers. Two of the officers, however, abstain from this exhibition of merriment. They are the third lieutenant and one of the midshipmen—on both of whose brows a cloud sits, seeming to grow darker each moment. They are both, evidently, intensely interested in the strange craft.

"Isn't it strange," continues the commander, musingly, "that your genuine tar, who will board an enemy's ship, crawling across the muzzle of a shotted gun—who has no fear of death in human shape, will act like a scared child when it threatens him in the guise of the Devil? I have no doubt, as you say, Mr. Black, that those fellows by the fore-castle are a bit shy about boarding the barque. Come, gentlemen! let me show you how to send their shyness adrift. I know them well, and can do it with a single word!"

The captain steps forward, the other officers following him.

When within speaking distance of the forward-deck, he stops, and makes sign that he has something to say. The tars are all attention.

"My lads!" exclaims their commander, "you see that barque we've been chasing; and at her mast-head a flag reversed—which you all know to be a signal of distress? That is a signal never to be disregarded by an American ship—much less an American man-of-war. Lieutenant! order a boat to be lowered, and let the boatswain pipe the crew. Only volunteers will be taken. Those who wish to go will muster on the main-deck."

A loud "hurrah" responds to the appeal; and while its echoes are still resounding through the ship, the whole frigate's crew seem crowding toward the main-deck. There are scores of volunteers, enough to man all the boats aboard.

"Now, gentlemen!" says the captain, turning to his officers with a proud expression upon his face, "there's the Yankee sailor for you. I've said he fears not man. And when humanity makes call, you see neither is he frightened at the Devil!"

A second cheer at the close of the speech, mingled with good-humored remarks, though not any loud laughter. The sailors simply acknowledge the compliment their captain has paid them; at the same time feeling that the moment is too sacred for merriment. Too solemn besides; for their instinct of humanity is yet under control of the weird feeling.

As the captain turns aft to the quarter, many of them fall away toward the fore-deck, till the group of volunteers for boarding becomes greatly diminished.

Still stay enough to man the largest boat in the ship.

"What boat is it to be?"

The question asked by the first lieutenant, as he follows the captain aft.

"The cutter," answers his superior, adding: "I think, Mr. Black, there's no necessity for sending any other boat. The cutter's crew will be sufficient. As to any fear of hostility on board the barque, that is absurd. We could blow her out of water with a single broadside."

"Who is to command the cutter, sir?"

The captain reflects, with a look cast inquiringly around.

His eye falls upon the third lieutenant, who stands near, seemingly courting the glance.

It is short and decisive. He knows the third officer to be a thorough seaman, and though young, capable of any duty, however delicate or dangerous. Without any further hesitation he appoints him to the command of the boarding-boat.

The latter enters upon the service with anxious alacrity—something more than the mere obedience due to discipline.

In a moment he is by the ship's side, superintending the lowering of the cutter—a task already begun.

He does not stand at rest, but is seen to help and hasten it, eager impatience sparkling in his eye.

While thus occupied he is accosted by another officer, younger than himself: the midshipman already mentioned.

"Can I go along with you?" he asks, respectfully saluting his superior.

"Certainly, my dear fellow!" responds the lieutenant in friendly, familiar tone; "I shall only be too pleased to have you. But as you know, you must get the captain's consent. Go and try."

The young officer glides aft, sees the frigate's commander upon the quarter-deck, and saluting says:

"Captain, may I go with the cutter?"

"Well, yes," responds the chief; "I have no objection."

Then, after taking a survey of him, he adds:

"Why do you want to go, young sir?"

The youth blushes without replying. There is a cast upon his countenance that strikes the questioner, and somewhat puzzles him.

But there is no time for either further inquiry or reflection. The cutter is already lowered, and rests upon the water. Her crew is crowding into her, and she will soon be shoved off from the ship.

"Go!" commanded the captain. "Report yourself to the third lieutenant, and tell him I sent you. You're young, and, like all youngsters, you want to gain glory, I suppose."

The young reefer glides away from the quarter-deck, lightly leaps over the bulwarks, drops down the companion, and takes his seat in the now waiting cutter, alongside the lieutenant.

Little dreamt his captain addressing him, that in that young sailor's heart there is a thought very different from what he himself divined—that his motive for requesting to be of the cutter's crew is far stronger than any that could be called forth by fame or glory.

CHAPTER III.

THE CUTTER'S CREW.

THE two ships still lie becalmed in the same relative position to one another, having changed from it scarce a cable's length, and lying stem to stern, just as the last breath of the breeze, blown gently against their sail, forsook them.

On both the canvas is still spread, though not belled. It hangs limp and loose, giving an occasional flap, so feeble as to show that it proceeds less from a current of air than a mere balancing motion of the vessel. For there is now not enough air stirring to float the feathers in the tail of a tropic-bird.

Both ships are motionless, their forms reflected in the water, so that each has its counterpart, keel to keel. But for the pointing of their masts, and reversed order of their rigging, four vessels might be fancied instead of two.

Between, the sea is smooth as a mirror, with that tranquil calm which has given to the Pacific its distinctive and soft-sounding appellation.

"Shove off!" commanded the lieutenant commanding the cutter.

Parting from the frigate's beam, the trim craft is steered straight for the becalmed barque, while all on board the man-of-war stand watching her, their eyes in turn set upon the strange vessel. From the frigate's forward-deck the men have an unobstructed view—especially those clustering around the head. Still there is a league between; and with the naked eye this hinders observation. They can but see the white spread sails, and the black hull underneath

them. The flag, now fallen, is scarce distinguishable from the mast, along which it hangs clinging. They can only tell its color, which is above crimson, with blue and white underneath—the reversed order of the Chilian ensign. Its lone star is no longer visible—nor aught of its heraldry late speaking sad.

But, if their sight fails to furnish them with details, these are amply supplied by their imagination. One can see men aboard the barque; scores, ay, hundreds of them!

After all she may be a pirate; and the upside-down ensign a decoy trick. Upon another tack she may be even a swifter sailing vessel than she has shown herself before the wind; and, knowing this, has been but playing with the frigate! If so, God help the cutter's crew!

These are human fears of the common kind felt, and expressed by many, upon the forward-deck of the frigate. But they are in no proportion to those who cling to a belief in the supernatural.

These stand gazing, now at the boat, now at the barque, expecting every moment to see the former sink beneath the sea; and the latter either tend off or melt into invisible air!

On parting from the ship the cutter has a league of calm sea to be cleft by her keel. A short league, and she will soon cleave it.

Manned by ten strong men, with as many oars propelling, she cuts the water like a knife; at times skimming so lightly as to seem leaping out of it.

The lieutenant, seated in the stern-sheets, with the midshipman by his side, directs the movements of the boat; while his glance is kept constantly upon the barque. So, also, that of the mid. In the eyes of both is an earnest expression, quite different from that of ordinary interrogation.

The men may not observe it; or, if they do, it is without comprehension of its meaning. They can but think of it as resembling their own, and coming from a like cause. For, although with backs turned toward the polacca, they cast occasional glances over their shoulders, in which curiosity is commingled with apprehension.

Despite their natural courage, strengthened by the late appeal to their humanity, the awe of the mysterious is again on them. Insidiously returning as they took seat in the boat, it increases as they go further from the ship and nearer to the strange vessel.

Less than half an hour elapses, and they are within a cable's length of the becalmed barque.

"How now?" commands the lieutenant.

The oar-stroke is promptly suspended, the blades held high above the water. The boat ceases way, and rests stationary upon the ocean.

All eyes are bent upon the barque; glances swept searchingly along her bulwarks, from poop to prow. No preparations to receive them! No one seen—not so much as a single head!

"Barque, ahoy!" hails the lieutenant.

"Barque, ahoy!" is heard in fainter tone. It is no answer. Only the echo of the officer's voice, coming back from the hollow timbers of the becalmed vessel. Then there is a grim silence, more profound than ever. For the men in the boat ceased muttering, their awe so intense as to hold them speechless.

"Barque, ahoy!" again shouts the lieutenant, louder than before. But with like result. As before only echoes.

There is either no one aboard, or no one who thinks worth while to answer.

The first supposition seems absurd, looking at the sail; the second equally so looking at the flag, and taking into account its character.

A third hail from the officer, this time vociferated in loudest voice, with interrogatory added: "Any one aboard?"

To the question no reply, any more than to the hail. Silence continues.

The men in the boat begin to doubt the evidence of their senses. Is there a ship before their eyes? Or is it all a delusion?

How can a vessel be under sail—full sail—without crew aboard of her? And if any, why does no one show at her side? Why does the hail thrice spoken—loudly shouted—remain unanswered? The last time loud enough to have been heard in the hold. It should have awakened even a sailor asleep in the fore-castle!

"Give way again!" cries the lieutenant. "Bring upon the larboard side, coxswain; under the fore-chains."

The oars are dipped, and the cutter propelled on. Scarce is she in motion when once more the lieutenant calls, "Hold!"

With his voice mingle others coming from on board the barque. Her crew seem at length to have awakened out of their sleep or stupor. A noise is heard upon her deck, as of a scuffle, accompanied by cries of strange intonation.

Soon two heads, apparently human, show above the bulwarks; their faces flesh-colored and thinly covered with hair. Then the whole bodies appear, also human-like, save that they are hairy all over—hair of a foxy-red!

They spring up the shrouds inside; and, clutching the ratlines, shake them with quick, violent jerks, at the same time uttering what appears angry speech, in an unknown tongue, and harsh, croaking voice, as if chiding off the intruders.

Only a short way up the shrouds, just as far as they could spring from the deck. Only a little while there. Then they drop down again, disappearing as suddenly as they had shown themselves.

The lieutenant's command was a word thrown away. Without it the men would have discontinued their stroke.

They have done so, and sit with bated breath, eyes strained, ears listening and lips mute—as if all had been suddenly struck dumb!

Silence throughout the boat—silence aboard the barque—silence everywhere; the only sound being the "drip-drop" of the water, as it falls from the feathered oar-blades.

CHAPTER IV.

ABOARD.

For a time the cutter's crew remain speechless, not one of them essaying to speak a word. They are so less from surprise than sheer, stark terror.

This is depicted on their faces, and no wonder. A ship manned by hairy men—a crew of veritable Oions!

One alone musters courage sufficient to speak in a half-whisper:

"Great God, shipmates, what can it all mean?"

But this superstitious fear, pervading the cutter's crew, does not extend to the two officers. They too have their fears, but of a different kind, and from a different cause. As yet neither has communicated to the other what he himself thinks. The appearance of the red men upon the ratlines—strange to the sailors—seems to have made things more intelligible to them. Judging by the expression upon their faces, both comprehend what has puzzled their companions; and with a sense of anxiety more than fear—more doubt than dismay.

The lieutenant speaks:

"Give way! Quick! Pull in! Head on for the fore-chains!"

His manner is excited; he is nervously impatient. The men execute the order slowly, and with evident reluctance, but they obey; and soon the prow of the boat strikes the barque abeam.

"Grapple on!" sings out the senior officer, soon as touching.

A boat-hook takes gripe in the chains; and the cutter, swinging round, lies at rest alongside.

The lieutenant is already on his feet, as also the mid.

The former, ordering the coxswain to follow, and the men to remain steady at their oars, leaps up to the chains, lays hold of them, and lifts himself aloft.

With like alacrity the reefer follows; and after him the coxswain.

Obedient to orders, the men remain in the boat, still seated upon the thwarts, in wonder at the reckless daring of their officers—at the same time silently admiring it.

Balancing himself on the bulwarks, steadied by a stay, the lieutenant looks down upon the deck of the polacca. His glance sweeps it forward, aft, and amidships; ranging from stem to stern, and back again.

Nothing seen there to explain the strangeness of things—nothing heard! No sailor on her fore-deck, nor officer on her quarter. Only the two strange beings that have already shown themselves on the shrouds.

These are still visible, one of them standing by the main-mast, the other crouching near the caboose. Both again give out their jabbering speech, accompanying it with gestures of menace.

Disregarding this, the lieutenant leaps down upon the deck, and makes toward them; the mid and coxswain keeping close after him.

At his approach the hirsute monsters retreat, not scared-like, but with a show of defiance, as if disposed to contest possession of the deck. They give back, however; bit by bit; till at length ceasing to dispute, they shuffle toward the quarter, and then on to the poop.

Strange, neither of the officers pay any attention to their demonstrations; and the movement aft is not made for them! Both seem excited by other thoughts—something else urging them on. Alone the coxswain is mystified by the hairy men, and some little alarmed; but without speaking, he follows his superiors.

Having boarded the barque by the fore-chains, the officers must pass the caboose going aft. Its sliding panel is open; and getting opposite, the three men come to a stand, a faint cry issuing out of the cook's quarters.

Looking in, they behold a startling spectacle.

On the bench in front of the galley fire—which shows as if long extinguished—sits a man bolt upright, his back against the bulk-head. Is it a man, or only the dead body of one? Certainly it is a human figure; or, speaking more precisely, a human skeleton with the skin still on—this as black as the coal-cinders in the grate in front of it.

It is a negro, and living; for at sight of them he shows motion, and makes an attempt to speak.

Only the coxswain stays to listen or hear what he has to say. The others hurry on aft, making straight for the cabin.

It is 'tween-decks, approached by a stairway. Reaching this, they rush down, and stand before the door, which they find shut. Only closed, not locked. It yields to the turning of the handle; and opening, gives them admission.

They enter hastily, without ceremony or announcement. Once inside, they as quickly come to a stop, both looking agast. The spectacle in the caboose was naught to that now before their eyes. That was only startling. This is appalling.

It is the main-cabin they have entered; not a large one, for the polacca has not been intended to carry passengers. Still it is snug, and large enough to give room to a table, six feet by four. Such a one stands in its center, its legs fixed in the floor; with four chairs around it, also fast.

On the table are decanters and dishes, alongside glasses and plates. It is a dessert-service; and on the dishes are fruits, cakes, and sweetmeats—with fragments of these upon the plates. The decanters contain wines of different sorts; and there is the same in the glasses, some of them part full.

There are four sets of them, corresponding to the four chairs; where, to all appearance, four guests had been seated at dessert. Two of the chairs are empty; as if those who occupied them had retired from the table, either to an inner state-room or on deck.

It is the side-chairs that are empty; and a fan lying on one, with a scarf over the back of that opposite, proclaimed their late occupants to have been ladies.

The other two guests are still seated at the table, head and foot—facing one another. And, oh, God, such guests!

Both are men; unlike him in the caboose, they are white. But like him, they too appear in the extreme of emaciation; jaws with the skin drawn tightly over them, cheek-bones prominent, chins protruding, and eyes sunken in their sockets.

Not dead either, for their eyes, glancing and glaring, still show life.

There is no other evidence of it. Sitting stiff in their chairs, rigidly erect, they make no attempt to stir, no motion of either body or limbs, but look as if from both all strength had departed, their famished figures showing the last stages of starvation!

And this in front of a table furnished with choice wines, fruits, and other comestibles; in short, loaded with delicacies!

What can it all mean?

Not this question, but a cry from the lips of the two officers, as they stand regarding the mysterious tableau.

Only for an instant. Then the lieutenant, springing back up the stairway, rushes to the side, and calls out:

"Back to the ship, and bring the surgeon! Quick, cutters! Quick!"

The boat's crew, obedient, push off with unusual alacrity. They are but too glad to get away from the weird spot.

As they pull back to the frigate, with faces turned toward the barque, and eyes searchingly bent upon her, they see naught there to give them a clew to the conduct of their officers—or in any way elucidate the series of mysteries, now prolonged into a chain.

And, as they recede from the strange vessel, one of them—still clinging to the belief that she is a specter—shakes his head, saying:

"Shipmates! we may never see that lieutenant again, nor that young reefer, nor the old cox—never!"

CHAPTER V.

THE CUTTER'S RETURN.

MEANWHILE, on board the man-of-war, all stand regarding the barque, at the same time watching the movements of the boat.

Only those who have glasses can see what is passing, and this but indistinctly. For the day is not a bright one. Besides, there is a haze over the sea hindering observation. It has arisen after the fall of the wind; perhaps caused by the calm, the increased heat drawing evaporation from the surface-water.

It is but a film; yet at such a distance interfering with the view through the telescopes.

Those who are there can just tell that the cutter has closed in upon the strange vessel, and is lying alone under the foremast shrouds. Some of her crew seem to swarm up the chains as if boarding.

This can not be told for certain. The haze around the barque is more dense than elsewhere, as if steam were passing off from her sides, and through the reek objects show confusedly.

While the frigate's officers are straining their eyes to make out the movements of the cutter, one of sharper sight than the rest cries out:

"See! the boat is coming back!"

Certainly she has shoved off from the side, and the men are in motion bending to their oars. She has separated from the strange vessel, and is rowing back, beyond doubt.

All see it now, and with some surprise. It is not ten minutes since she grappled on. Why such sudden separation?

While they are conjecturing as to its cause, the same officer again sees something that has escaped the observation of the others. There are but eight oars, instead of ten—the regulation strength of the cutter; and ten men where before there were thirteen. Three of the boat's crew are missing!

This need not cause alarm, nor to the frigate's officers does it, that the three have gone aboard the barque; and for some reason, whatever it be, elected to stay there. They know their brother officer to be not only a brave man, but one of quick decision and prompt action. In this case it is as might be expected. He has boarded the distressed barque, discovered the cause of distress, and sent the cutter back to bring whatever is needed for her relief. Thus reasons the quarter-deck.

It is different before the mast. There have sprung up suspicions about the missing men; fears that some misfortune may have happened them. True, there were no shots heard, nor flashes seen—no signs of a struggle. Still men could be killed without firearms; and savages might use other and more noiseless weapons. The tale of the skin-clad men gives color to this suggestion. But then their own men went armed, the cutter's crew, in addition to their cutlasses, being provided with boarding-pistols. Had they been attacked, they would not have retreated without discharging them—no, not to leave three of their number behind. And there had been no show of a fight—none seen.

All the more mystery; and, pondering upon it, the frigate's crew fall back to their faith in the supernatural. Surely is the polacca a specter!

Meanwhile the cutter is making way across the stretch of calm sea separating the two vessels; and although less than her full complement of oars, she is cleaving the water quickly. The movements of the men indicate excitement, and show them pulling with all their strength—as if rowing in a regatta.

Soon they are near enough to be individually distinguished; and it is seen that neither of the officers are in the boat. Nor yet the coxswain, one of the displaced oarsmen having hold of the tiller-ropes.

This is a little strange. At least the mid should have come back in charge of the boat.

Still it is not much, and the frigate's officers dismiss it from their minds. They are all too anxious to hear the views, the report expected from the strange vessel. Whether a tale of distress or not, it cannot fail to be interesting.

As the boat forges nearer, and the filmy haze less obscures their vision, they can distinguish the faces of the two men seated in the stern sheets. They can see that they are pallid, with an expression between doubt and fear, which no one can interpret.

No one tries. All stand silently waiting.

The cutter at length comes alongside, sweeping past the bows, and bringing up on the frigate's star-board beam, under the main-chains.

The officers step forward along the gangway and stand looking over the bulwarks; while the men come crowding aft, as far as permitted.

The curiosity of all receives a check—an abrupt disappointment. There is no news from the barque, save the meager scrap contained in the lieutenant's order: "Bring the surgeon."

Beyond this the cutter's crew know nothing.

Yes, something. They have seen the hairy men! Seen and heard them, though without understanding a word of what these had said. Two of the strange beings had rushed up the shrouds, shook the ratlines, and shouted at the cutter's people, as if scolding them off.

They had heard them jabbering at the officers, after these went aboard; and, on pulling away from

the polacca, they could see them standing upon her poop, just abaft the binnacle.

The tale spreads like wildfire through the frigate, fore and aft, quick as a train of gunpowder, ignited. It is everywhere talked of and commented on.

On the quarter it seemed strange enough; while forward it has further strengthened the thought already rife—the belief in something weird, supermundane.

They give credulous ear to the sailor, again repeating what he has said in the boat, using the same words:

"We may never see that lieutenant again, nor that young reefer, nor the old cox—never!"

The boding speech seems, as if a prophecy, soon to be realized—if not so already. Scarce has it passed his lips, when a cry rings through the ship, that startles all on board—thrilling them more intensely than ever.

While the men have been speculating upon the message brought back from the barque, and exchanging conjectures upon it, while the officers have been hastening its execution—the surgeon getting out his instruments, with such *epitomized pharmacopoeia* as the occasion seems to call for—the strange vessel has been for a time forgotten, or unthought of.

The cry raised recalls her to their minds, causing them to rush toward the frigate's side, and bend their eyes upon the barque.

No, not on her. That they cannot do. Only in the direction where she was last seen. For, to the astonishment of most, and the terror of many, the polacca has disappeared!

CHAPTER VI.

THE BLACK SQUALL.

THE mystery of the disappearance of the chased vessel is explained by a very natural phenomenon—a fog.

Not the haze already spoken of, but a dense bank of dark vapor, that, drifting over the surface of the sea, has suddenly enveloped the barque in its floating folds.

It threatens to do the same with the ship.

Those aboard of her see this; and while their surprise is almost instantly over, an undefined fear continues to torture them.

It is not on account of the fog. That cannot frighten men who have experienced all the dangers of the deep, and oft groped their way through icy seas shrouded in almost amorphous darkness.

Their fear springs from the idea already mentioned, by this last circumstance strengthened, that all the phenomena are not natural. The fog itself may be, but what has brought it on, just at a crisis when they were speculating about the character of the chased vessel—some doubting her honesty, others skeptical of her reality—not a few boldly averring her to be a phantom? If an accident of nature, certainly a remarkable one—in point of time a strange contingency!

The reader may smile at credulity of this kind. Though not he who has mixed among the men of the fore-castle—whatever the nationality of the ship, and whether merchantman or man-of-war. Not all the training of naval schools, nor the boasted enlightenment of this our age, has fully eradicated from the mind of the canvas-clad mariner a belief in something more than he has seen—something *dehors la nature*. To suppose him emancipated from superstition, would be to hold him of higher intelligence than his fellow-men who stay ashore, plowing the soil, as he does the sea. To thousands of these he can point, saying: behold the believers in *spiritual* existences, in very ghosts, not in days gone by, but now—ay, now more than ever within memory of man.

Then let not landmen sneer at such fancies—not a whit more absurd than their own credulous conceits about table-turning and the other paraphernalia of mesmeric manifestations.

In addition to this feeling on the frigate—confined to a few—there is now cause for real alarm, in which all have a share, even her officers. A fog is before their eyes—apparently fast approaching them. They see that it has curtains the strange vessel, spreading over her like a pall; and threatens to do the same with their own ship.

Is there any thing alarming in this? A landsman might make answer in the negative. Not so the skilled sailor. Not so the captain of the frigate and his officers.

Even the youngest of them can tell there is danger in the sign. For these have witnessed a similar phenomenon before; and know that that thick sky seen southward is not a fog of the ordinary kind, but one that portends the most terrible of storms.

They know that it is near, and will soon be on them, quick as a white squall. Though it is not this, but the *black squall* of the Pacific.

Enough in the name to cause apprehension for the safety of their ship. Though scarce of her are they thinking. She is a stout vessel, and can stand the buffeting of the tempest. Their anxiety is about their absent shipmates. All comprehend the peril in which these are placed. Even if it were but a common fog, they know the danger of the two ships getting separated, and then what will be the fate of those left on board the barque?

The strange vessel has been signaling distress. Is it scarcity of provisions or want of water? In either case she will be worse off now. Three additional throats and stomachs!

It can not be shortness of hands to work her sails? Surely not, with them all set?

Sickness then? Some scourge affecting the crew—cholera or yellow fever? This is probable by the lieutenant having sent back for the surgeon—only him!

Conjecturing ends, and suddenly. The time for action has arrived. The dark cloud comes drifting on, and is soon around the ship, enveloping her in its damp, murky embrace, clinging to her canvas still spread, and wetting it till big drops rain down upon her decks!

It is no longer a question of the surgeon starting forth on his errand of humanity; nor the cutter returning to the becalmed barque. Now there is no chance of discovering the latter. In such a fog the finest ship that ever sailed sea, with the smartest crew that ever manned vessel, will be helpless as a man groping his way in Cimmerian darkness.

For a time there is no more thought of the barque,

and not much about the absent officers. Almost on the instant of the frigate's sails becoming enveloped in vapor, they are struck by a strong wind, coming from a quarter the very opposite to that for which they were set.

The voice of the master, now thundering through a trumpet, orders all canvas to be instantly taken in.

The order is executed with the promptitude peculiar to a man-of-war; and in less than ten minutes, the huge ship is tossing amidst tempestuous waves with only three sails set—jib, fore-course and storm-trysail.

CHAPTER VII.

GONE FOR GOOD.

A SHIP under a storm-trysail is a sight always melancholy to the mariner. It tells of a struggle with wind and wave—a serious conflict with the elements, that may well cause anxiety to those who have to carry it on.

Such is the situation of the American frigate soon after being surrounded by the fog. The sea, late so smooth, calm as a sleeping child, is now furiously raging around her, the waves tempest-lashed, showing crests like the manes of white horses, tossed in mad prancing.

Amid them the huge war-ship, but a short while before motionless, a leviathan, apparently the sea's lord, is now its slave, and soon may be its victim. Bobbing like a cork, she is buffeted from wave to wave, or thrown into the troughs between, as if cast there in scorn.

She has enough trouble taking care of herself without thought of any other ship—even one flying a flag of distress. Ere long she may have to hoist the same signal herself.

But there are skilled seamen aboard, who well know what they are about—who watch and ward every wave that comes sweeping along. Some of these, mountains high, show the big ship almost on beam-ends, till the steersman feels her well-nigh regardless of the rudder.

There are but two courses left for safety; and her captain weighs the choice between them. They must lie to, or scud before the wind. To do the latter might take them away from the barque, now no longer seen? And she may never be sighted again by the frigate? Ten chances to one if she will; or she may not decide upon running down the wind. Even if she do, there will be but slight hope of overhauling her, supposing the storm to continue for any length of time.

The probabilities are that the barque will lie to. The lieutenant, now aboard of her, has no doubt control; he will order her canvas to be furled, and set the storm-trysail as on board the frigate. Under the circumstances he would not think of parting from the spot.

Thus reflecting, the frigate's commander determines to stay where he is, and ride out the gale.

Everything is already snug, and the ship's head put right for the wind's eye.

Aboard of her, brave hearts are filled with sad forebodings. Not from any fear for themselves, but for the safety of their shipmates on the barque. Both the young officers are favorites with their comrades of the quarter-deck, as with the crew. So, too, the coxswain who accompanies them.

What will be their fate?

All are thinking of it, but no one offers a surmise; no one can tell to what they have committed themselves. They only know, that in the tempest now raging, there must be danger to the strange vessel, without counting that signaled by the reversed ensign, without thought of the mystery already wrapping her.

The heart of every man in the war-ship is beating with humanity, pulsing with pent-up fear.

And while waves are pitching her about, and winds rattling loudly amid her spars and rigging, a yet louder sound is heard mingling with their monotonies. It is heard at equal intervals; for it is the minute gun which the frigate has commenced firing. Not as a signal of distress, asking for assistance; but one of counsel and cheer seeking to give it!

Every sixty seconds, amid the mad surging of the sea and the hoarse groaning of the gale, the boom of cannon breaks their monotonous continuity.

The night comes down, adding to the darkness, though not much to the dilemma in which the frigate has found herself. The fog and storm combined made her situation perilous, as might be. It could not well be worse.

Both continue throughout the night; and on through the night she keeps discharging her signal guns.

No one aboard of her thinks of listening for a response. In all probability there is no cannon—nothing upon the polacca that could give it.

Close upon the hours of morning the storm begins to abate, and the clouds to dissipate. The fog seems to be lifting, or drifting off to some other part of the ocean.

With hope again dawning comes the dawn of day. The crew of the frigate—every man of them, officers and tars—are upon deck.

They stand along the ship's sides, ranged in rows by the bulwarks, gazing out upon the sea.

There is no fog now—not even the thinnest film. The sky is as clear as silk, and blue as a boat-race ribbon, fresh unfolded. The sea the same, its big billows no longer showing sharp crests, but rounded, and rolling gently along.

Over these the sailors look, scanning the surface. Their glances are sent searchingly to every quarter—every point of the compass.

The officers sweep the horizon with their glasses, ranging around the circle where the two blues meet.

But, neither naked eye nor telescope can discern aught there. Only the swelling sea and the sapphire sky. Some gulls here and there flapping their white wings, an albatross, with pinions of broader spread, or a tropic bird, with long tail-feathers trailing train-like behind it.

No barque, polacca-rigged or otherwise; no ship of any kind; no sign of sail; no canvas spread, except that of the frigate herself, now standing under close-reefed courses.

She is alone upon the ocean—in the midst of the mighty Pacific—a mere speck upon its far-stretching, illimitable expanse!

Every man aboard of her feels this, and feels it with a sense of sadness. But, they are silent, each

inquiring of himself what is become of the barque; and what has been the fate of their shipmates.

One alone is heard speaking aloud, his speech giving expression to a thought, late his own, but now common to all.

He is a sailor—the same who twice uttered the prediction, which now, for the third time, he repeats—changing it to the assertion of a certainty.

To a group gathered around him, he says:

"As I told you, shipmates; we'll never see that lieutenant again; nor that young reefer; nor the old cox. No—they're gone for good!"

CHAPTER VIII.

SAN FRANCISCO IN 1849.

SAN FRANCISCO, the capital of Alta California.

San Francisco, in the year of our Lord Eighteen Hundred and Forty-nine.

Our story takes us there and then; to scenes and incidents occurring a short time anterior to those already described.

A singular city, San Francisco, at that time; very different from what it is to-day, and equally unlike what it was twelve months before the date given above, when the obscure village of Yerba Buena yielded up its name, along with its site, entering on what may be termed its second genesis.

The little *pueblita*, built of sun-dried bricks, its petty commerce in hides and tallow represented by three or four schooner craft, one morning wakes up to behold whole fleets of ships come crowding through the golden gate, and letting go their anchors in front of its wharfed landing.

They come from all parts of the Pacific, from all the other oceans, from the ends of the earth, carrying every kind of flag known to the nations.

The whaleman, late striking "leviathan" in the Arctic, with him who has been chasing "cachelot" in the Pacific and Indian; the merchantman, standing toward Australia, China and Japan; the trader among the South Sea Islands; the coaster of Mexico, Chili and Peru; the man-of-war of many builds—frigate, corvette, sloop and double-decker; even the Chinese junk and Malayan prahu are seen sailing into San Francisco bay, and coming to, opposite the beach of Yerba Buena!

What has caused this grand spreading of canvas, and commingling of queer craft? What is still causing it—for still they come?

The answer lies in a little word of only four letters: the same that, from the beginning of man's activity on earth, has moved him to many things—too oft to deeds of evil. And woman also, alas! The word is not love, but what many suppose may purchase it: *gold*.

Some two twelvemonths before, the Swiss *émigre*, Sutter, scouring out his mill-race on a branch of the Sacramento river, observes shining speculæ among the mud. Taking them up, and holding them in the hollow of his hand, he feels that they are heavy, and sees them to be of golden sheen.

And gold they prove when submitted to the test.

The son of Helvetia discovers the precious metal in grains and nuggets—interspersed with the silt of a fluvial deposit—in *placers*.

They are not the first found in California; but the first coming under the eyes of Saxon settlers—men imbued with energy to collect and carry them to the far-off outside world.

Two years have elapsed since the digging of Sutter's mill-dam. Meanwhile the specks that scintillated in its ooze have been transported over the ocean, and exhibited in the great cities—in the windows of brokers and bullion-merchants. The sight has proved sufficient to people thickly the banks of the Sacramento—hitherto sparsely settled—and cover San Francisco bay with ships from every quarter of the habitable globe.

Not only is the harbor of Yerba Buena crowded with strange craft, but its streets with queer characters—adventurers of every race and clime—among whom may be heard an exchange of tongues, the like never listened to since the abortive attempt at building Babel.

All this in two years. And within this time the mud-walled dwellings disappear; swallowed up, smothered amid the modern surrounding of canvas tents and weather-board houses that have risen as by magic around them.

A like change has taken place in their occupancy. No longer the tranquil interiors; the *tertuli* with its guests supping aniseed and curacao, or munching sweet cakes and *confitures*.

Instead, the new habitations ring with boisterous revelry, smelling of mint and Monongahela; and, though the guitar still tinkles, it is almost inaudible amid the louder strains of clarionet, fiddle and trombone.

What a change in the traffic of the streets! No longer silent, at certain hours devoted for the siesta; at others trodden by sandaled monks and shovel-hatted priests—both bold of gaze when passing the dark-eyed doncellas in high shell combs and black silk mantillas; bolder when saluting the brown-skinned daughters of the Aborigine wrapped in their blue-gray rebozos.

Trodden, too, by the *presidio* soldiers in uniform of French cut and color; by the officers glittering in gold lace; by the townsmen in cloaks of blue broadcloth; the *haciendado* on horseback, and the *ranchero* in his picturesque attire.

Some of these are still seen, but not, as of yore, swaggering and conspicuous. Amid the concourse of new-comers they move timidly, jostled by rough, stalwart men in red flannel shirts, buck-skin and blanket coats, with pistols in their belts, and bowie-knives hanging handy along their hips. Others equally formidable in Guernsey frocks, or wearing the dreadnought jacket of the sailor; not a few scarce clothed at all, shrouding their nakedness in such rags as remain after a long journey overland or a longer voyage by sea.

In all probability, since its beginning the world has never witnessed so strange an assemblage of men tramping the streets of a seaport town as those seen in Yerba Buena, just baptized San Francisco, *Anno Domini* 1849.

And perhaps never a more varied display of bunting in a bay.

In all certainty, harbor never held so large a number of ships with so few men to man them. At least the half are crewless; and two-thirds nearly so. Many have but their captain and mates, with, it may be, the carpenter and cook.

The sailors are ashore, and but few of them intend returning aboard. They have gone off to the gold diggings, or are going. There has been a general *debandade* among the Jack-tars, leaving the fore-castle almost empty. There is a striking contrast between the streets of the town and the ships in its harbor; on the former an eager throng, pushing, jostling, rushing noisily along, with all the excited impatience of men half mad; on the latter silence, inaction, the torpor of lazy life, as if the huge leviathans, many of them splendid vessels, were but hulks laid up for good, never again going to sea!

CHAPTER IX.

A BRACE OF MIDDIES.

NOT all the ships in San Francisco harbor are crewless. A few still have their full complement of hands; these being mostly men-of-war.

The strict naval discipline prevents desertion, though it needs some strategy to assist. They ride at anchor far out, beyond swimming distance from the beach; and will not allow shore boats to approach them. The tar who attempts to take French leave will have a severe swim for it, and perchance get a shot that will send him instant to the bottom.

With this menace constantly before their minds, even California's gold does not tempt many of them to running the gantlet, or trying it.

Among the ships keeping up this iron discipline is one bearing the "Flag of the Stars and Stripes." She is a man-of-war, full-sized, conspicuous by her handsome hull and clean, tapering spars. Her sails are stowed snug, lashed neatly along the yards; in her rigging not a rope out of place.

Upon her decks, white as holystone can make them, the same regularity is observable. Every cable is coiled, every brace trimly turned upon its belaying-pin.

It could not be otherwise with the *Crusader*, commanded by Captain Bracebridge. He is a sailor of the old school who takes a pride in his ship.

He has his crew aboard, every one of them. There is not a name on the *Crusader's* books but has its representative in a live sailor, either seen upon her decks, or who can at any moment be summoned thither by the whistle of the boatswain.

If left to themselves, but few of the "*Crusaders*" would care to desert. Even gold does not tempt them to leave a ship where everything is so agreeable. For Captain Bracebridge does all in his power to make matters pleasant, for the men, as well as the officers. He sees that the former get good grub and plenty of it, including the regulation allowance of grog, with now and then an extra glass. He permits them to have amusements among themselves; while the officers treat them to *tableaux-vivants*, charades, and private theatricals.

To crown all, a grand ball has been given on board the ship, previous to her departure for the Sandwich Islands—an event near at hand. It was in return for an entertainment of the same kind, given by some *grandees* of the town in honor of her officers, at which more than one of these made acquaintances they wished to meet again; two desiring it with a longing of a special kind.

In other words, two of the ship's officers have fallen in love with a brace of shore damsels, with whom they have danced, and perhaps a little flirted.

They are both young men—in rank reefers—neither much over twenty. For all this, they are as much in love as they could be at thirty—it may be more.

It is three days after the ball, and these two officers are standing upon the poop-deck, conversing about it. They are apart from their comrades; purposely, as their talk is confidential.

The elder, called Crozier—Edward Crozier—is a little over twenty, while the younger, William Cadwallader, is about as much under it. Crozier has passed his term of probationary service, and is now a passed-midshipman, while the other is still a "midshipmite." And a type of this last, just as Marryatt would have made him, is Willie Cadwallader; bright face, light-colored hair, curling over cheeks ruddy as the bloom upon a peach or pippin. He is a Philadelphia boy, of Welsh descent, from which he derives an eye of turquoise blue, often observed in the descendants of the Cymri; as also hair of a hue seen nowhere else—like threads of gold invested with a tissue of silver.

Quite different is Edward Crozier, who hails from the State and city of New York.

His hair, also slightly curling, is dark brown. His complexion corresponds, and a pair of mustaches, already well grown, lie like leeches along his lip, the tips turned upward. An aquiline nose, and broad jaw-blades, denote resolution—a character borne out by the glance of an eye that never shows quailing.

He is of more than medium size, with a figure denoting great strength, and capable of carrying out any resolve his mind may make—the shoulders square set, breast well bowed out, the arms and limbs in symmetrical proportion.

In point of personal appearance he is the superior, though both are handsome fellows—each in his own style.

And as the styles are different, so are their dispositions—these rather contrasting. Crozier is serious, sedate, and though anything but morose, rarely given to mirth. From the face of Cadwallader the laugh is rarely absent, and the dimple on his cheek—to employ a printer's phrase—seems stereotyped. With the young Pennsylvanian a joke might be carried to the extreme of the practical. He would seek his *revanche* by a lark of like kind.

With him of New York the same would be dangerous, and might end in a stern resentment—perhaps in a duel.

Notwithstanding their difference, the two are friends—the fastest on the ship. This perhaps due to the very dissimilitude of their natures. When not separated by their respective duties, they keep together aboard ship, and together if ashore. They eat together, drink together, and for the first time in the lives of both, have commenced making love together.

Fortune has favored them in this: that they are not in love with the same lady—still further, that their sweethearts do not dwell apart, but live under one roof, and belong to one family.

For all that, they are not sisters, nor yet cousins; though standing in a certain relationship. One is the aunt of the other.

Such kinship might seem to augur inequality in their ages. There is none, or only a little. Not much more than between the mids themselves. The aunt is, as may be supposed, the senior of her niece.

And, as Fate has willed it, the lots of the lovers have been cast in conformity—in proper symmetry and proportion. Crozier is in love with the *tiia*; Cadwallader with the *sobrina*.

I use these Spanish words, because the same that have been for some time sounding in the ears of the two young officers. Their sweethearts are Spanish of the purest blood. They are respectively the daughter and grand-daughter of Don Gregorio Montijo, whose dwelling can be seen from the ship—a mansion of imposing appearance, in the Mexican *hacienda* style, pitched upon the summit of a hill, that slopes up from the shore, at some distance off, outside the city walls.

While conversing the two young officers have their eyes turned upon it, one of the two assisting his vision with a telescope.

It is Cadwallader who uses the glass.

Holding it to his eye, he says:

"I think I see them, Ned. At all events, on the housetop there's something—like two heads just showing over the parapet. I'll take odds, it's the dear girls! I wonder if they can see us?"

"Not likely, unless, like ourselves, they are provided with telescopes."

"By Jove! I believe they've got that. I see something that glances. I'll warrant one of them is looking through a lens, and it's my sweetheart."

"Bah! give me the glass, Cad. With all those bright blue eyes you're so proud of, I can sight a sail further than you."

"A sail—yes. But not a pretty face. No—you're blind to beauty, else you'd never have taken on to that old aunt, leaving the niece to me. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Old, indeed! She's as young as yours—younger—at least looks so. One tress of her hair—is worth all on your girl's head. Look at that."

Crozier pulls out a lock, and holds it up before the other's eyes. It gleams golden with a radiance of red. He adds:

"Did you ever see anything in the way of woman's hair so beautiful? Observe the gloss and color—pure amber!"

"Oakum!" cries Cadwallader, sneeringly. "You look at this!" he adds, also exhibiting a tress. "I suppose you fancied yourself the only one who has received favors. You see I've got one as well as you. There's a bit of hair that beside yours is like costly silk alongside cheap cotton. What do you think of it? There's a color for you?"

"The color of tar!" retorts Crozier.

The two stand holding the locks of hair, each caressing his own. Then both burst into laughter and stow away their tresses.

Crozier in turn taking hold of the glass levels it on the hacienda.

After a time he says:

"You're right about one thing, Will—those heads are the same from which we've got our hair. The two girls, to a certainty. And I fancy they're looking this way—I hope expecting us. Well, we'll be with them, please God, before the sun goes down, and then you'll see how much superior bright amber is to dull black anywhere in the world, but especially in the light of a California sunset."

"Nowhere, Ned, under either sun or moon. Give me the girl that's got raven hair."

"For me her with locks of gold."

"Eada uno a su gusto, as my sweetheart has taught me to say in her sweet Castilian. But now, Ned, talking serious, do you think the captain will allow us to go ashore?"

"He must; it's our right, both of us. Besides, I know he will."

"How do you know it?"

"Bah, *ma bohil*, as our Irish second would say; you're the son of a poor man—good blood, I admit—while I am the heir of ten thousand a year, with a father who stands well at Washington. I have asked leave for both. Therefore, don't be uneasy about our getting it. Captain Bracebridge is no snob; but for all that he knows his own interest, and won't refuse a fair request. See, there's the first lieutenant coming to give his answer, which, I'll bet ten dollars, will be in the affirmative."

"Young gentlemen, the captain gives you leave to go ashore. The gig will take you, landing where you wish. You are to send the boat back, and give the coxswain orders where and when he is to await you on your return to the ship. Take my advice, youngsters, and don't be getting into any difficulties on land. As you know, San Francisco is now full of all sorts of queer characters—a very pandemonium of devils. For the sake of the service and the honor of the uniform you wear, steer clear of scrapes; and above all, give a wide berth to wine and women."

The lieutenant, a grave man, after thus delivering himself, turns on his heel and walks away, leaving the two mids to their meditations.

They do not meditate long. Leave has been granted to go ashore, and with it an order for the gig to be got ready. The boat is in the water, and her crew swarming over the side.

Crozier and Cadwallader only stay to give a touch to their toilet—preparatory to appearing under eyes both have more reason to dread than a broadside of great guns.

This arranged, they drop down the man-ropes, seat themselves in the stern-sheets, and give the order to shove off.

Soon they are gliding over the tranquil waters of San Francisco Bay, not in the direction of the landing-wharf, but for a point on the beach, some distance outside the city walls.

The beacon toward which they are steering is the house of Don Gregorio Montijo.

CHAPTER X.

A COUPLE OF CAVALLIEROS.

At the same time that the two young officers are rowed away from the ship, two men on horseback ride out from the suburbs of San Francisco, taking the road along shore.

Both are garbed in grand style in the national costume of New Spain, which in picturesque splendor is not exceeded by any other in the world.

They wear the wide trousers, *calzoneras*, lashed with gold-lace and studded with buttons from hip to ankle—white drawers, *calzoncillos*, here and there

showing along the seams—*botas* of stamped leather; and spurs with silver rowels, several inches in diameter, glittering like great stars behind the heels.

They have tight-fitting *jaquetas* of velvet, close in front, and over the bosom elaborately embroidered; scarfs of China crape around their waists, the ends dangling adown the left hip, terminating in a fringe of gold cord; on their heads, *sombreros*, with broad brims, and bands of bullion—the *toquilla*.

In addition, each has over his shoulders a *manga*—the most magnificent of outside garments—draping gracefully as a woman's toga. That of one is scarlet, the other is sky-blue.

Their horses are not less splendidly caparisoned. Saddles of stamped leather, scintillating with silver studs; housings elaborately brodered, bridles of plaited hair, jointed with tags and tassels; bits of Mameluke pattern, having checks and curbs powerful enough to break the jaw at a single jerk. The steeds thus proudly caparisoned are worthy of it. Though small, they are of perfect shape, pure blood of Arabian sires transmitted through dams of Andalusia. They are the descendants of the stock taken to the New World by the *Conquistadores*, and the ancestor of one or both may have carried Alvarado or Sandoval, if not Cortez himself.

The riders are both of them men of dark complexion, with traits that tell of Latinic race. Their features are Spanish, in one more pronounced than the other. He who wears the sky-colored *manga* is undoubtedly a Mexican. The blood that gives the brown tinge to his skin is not Moorish, but more likely comes from the aborigines of California. For all that, he is not *mestizo*; only one among whose remote ancestry an Indian woman has figured as one of the roots of the family tree.

He is a man of medium size, with a squat frame, somewhat spare, sitting his horse as though he were part of the animal. Were he afoot, his legs would appear bowed below the thighs, almost banded; showing that he has spent most of his life in the saddle.

His face is flat, in outline rather rounded, with a nose much compressed, nostrils agape, and lips thick enough to suggest the idea of an African origin. But his hair contradicts this. It is straight as needles, and black as the skin of a Colobus monkey. More like he has it from the Malay, through the Californian Indian—some tribes of which are undoubtedly of Malayan or Mongolian race.

Whatever the mixture in his blood, the man is himself a native Californian, born by San Francisco Bay and brought up on its shore.

He is twenty-five years of age, and his name is Faustino Calderon—"Don" by right of ancestry, and the ownership of a *ganaderia*, or grazing farm.

He in the scarlet *manga* is altogether different; personally handsomer, and to all appearance, intellectually superior. His features are more purely Spanish, and better formed. The outline is oval and regular; the jaws broad and balanced; the chin well formed; the nose prominent without being beaked; the brow classically cast; surmounted by a thick *chereure* of hair—coal-black in color. Eyes of this hue, eyebrows corresponding. Heavy mustache on the upper, and an imperial on the under lip, this last extending below the point of the chin; all the rest of his face—throat and cheeks—clean shaven—these are the facial characteristics of Don Francisco de Lara.

His figure is of better build than that of his companion, larger in size, and of greater strength.

True, Don Faustino is a gentleman by birth and a *ganadero* by occupation. He inherits the pasture lands left him by his father, with the cattle that browse upon them. An only son, he is owner of all. But his ownership is not likely to continue; he is fast losing it, by following evil courses—among them three of a special kind: wine, women and *monte*.

These promise ere long to make him bankrupt in purse, as they have already done in character.

Around San Francisco, as in it, he is known as a *roue* and reveler, a debauchee in every sense of the word, and a fool as well. For, naturally of weak intellect, his long-continued dissipation has rendered it weaker.

Of equal moral darkness, perhaps in greater degree, but different in kind, is the character of Don Francisco de Lara, "Frank Lara," as he is familiarly known in the streets and saloons of San Francisco.

Though Spanish in features, and speaking the language, he can also talk English fluently and well. And French, too, when called upon, with a little Portuguese and Italian. He is, in truth, not Spanish at all, though of Spanish descent, hailing from New Orleans—hence his philological acquirements.

Frank Lara is one of those children of chance, "*ninos perdidos*," who have come into the world, nobody knows how, when, or whither; only that they are in it. And while in it, performing a *metier* in accordance with their mysterious origin, living luxuriously, and finding the means of such life by ways that can only be guessed at.

He is full thirty years of age, six of which he has spent on the shores of San Francisco Bay. Landing there from an American ship, and in sailor's dress—a mate, it is said—he cast off his tarry togs and took to the Californian costume. Its splendor was to his liking, and so, too, the life of the country. Lawless, it suited his natural inclination; and, above all, his *penchant* for gaming, with him a passion. He became noted in the cock-pit, and at the *monte* table, making money by both—enough to keep him in form, without the necessity of asking favor from any one.

Similar inclinations and pursuits, with somewhat opposite characters, at an early period brought him and Don Faustino together, forming ties between now firmly knotted. Of late more than ever, for, since the gold fever, and consequent Anglo-Saxon invasion, they have become united in a partnership of something besides dissipation. They are partners in business—in a "*bank*." Not one of the ordinary kind, for discount and deposit, with desks and counters for the transaction of its affairs, but such as may be seen in any Californian town—in a saloon, with a single table in its center, covered with green cloth, and a row of benches around it; in short, a *monte-bank*.

Since the discovery of the gold *placers*, the streets of San Francisco have become crowded with men mad after the precious metal; among them many who do not desire the toll of sifting it out of sand,

washing it from black mud, nor yet crushing it clear of quartz rock. They prefer the easier and cleaner method of gathering it in across the green balze of a gambling-table.

To accommodate such dainty gentry, Don Francisco de Lara has set up a *monte-bank*, with Don Faustino Calderon as his backer.

Though Calderon in reality is the man of money, he does not show in the transaction. He has still some lingering thought about respectability, and does not appear in it. He is but the sleeping partner; while Lara, having less to lose in the way of character, is the active and ostensible one.

Such are the two men who have issued from the town of San Francisco, and are riding along the shore of its bay.

CHAPTER XI.

WILD WORDS.

As the two equestrians, so splendidly equipped, canter out through the suburbs, they are seen by many—some who know and recognize them; others who only admire their grand style and picturesque habiliments. Among the last are the late comers to California, who have never before seen citizens in such shining array.

Further on they encounter but few people, and fewer who do not know them. For they are now nearly beyond the range of the red shirts, and meet only the natives.

Most of these can tell where they are going—or guess it—at least as many as may recognize them. They would say that Faustino Calderon was on his way to the house of Don Gregorio Montijo, and could give a guess at his errand. About that of Francisco de Lara they might not be so sure, though they may say he was going there too.

Strange all this to one unacquainted with California and its ways—especially one also acquainted with the character of the two "*cavalleros*." He would naturally ask how men so tainted could be on visiting terms with the family of Don Gregorio Montijo; one of the first in San Francisco or its neighborhood, ranking with the "*ricos*"—the *familias principales*.

By one not knowing the country the answer guessed or given would be—a negative.

But not in California of the olden time, where every second man met is a gambler, professionally, or in practice. Not a few women as well!

The man who does not occasionally cast dice or stake doubloons upon the turning of a card, is a *rara avis*. The keeper of a *monte-bank* may not be deemed so respectable as a banker of the ordinary kind. Still is he not socially tabooed, nor does society reject him even if poor. If rich, it caresses him.

As yet, Don Faustino Calderon does not come under the category of the professed gambler; and respectability does not repel him. His dissipation is far from exceptional, and his father's good name still shields him; under its *agis* he is eligible to Californian society—the Spanish section of it—and has the *entree* of all its circles.

And so has Don Francisco de Lara—in a different way. Wealth secures him this. He has the repute of being rich, and carries about him the evidence of it. He is always in good form and fashionably attired. His shirt is of the finest linen, with diamond studs sparkling in its front. Upon his fingers glitter the gems of Golconda. He is free in dispensing gratuities. He gives to the poor, and the priests; the last kind of charity being the best as a speculation.

He intends it as such, and it has well repaid the outlay. For in California, as in other Catholic countries, the dispenser of "Peter's pence" is sure of being held respectable.

Frank Lara has dispensed them with a liberal hand, and is therefore styled Don Francisco de Lara—saluted as such by the sandaled monks, and shovel-hatted priests, who meet him on road or street.

By men of other professions, and women, too. For he is good-looking and of graceful deportment; *debonnaire* without being either top or dandy. On the contrary, he carries himself with an earnest air, calm and loot; while in his eye may be read the expression, "*Noli me tangere*." He has come from a city in which dueling is a specialty. Since his arrival in California he has twice called out his man, one of the times killing him.

"*Escroc*," as the French might call him, "black-leg" in the English vocabulary, "sport" in American phrase; Frank Lara is a man with whom no one who knows him will like to take liberties.

In the companionship of Calderon, under his wing as it were, he is admitted into the best houses. Along with the latter he is even now on the way to that of Don Gregorio Montijo—to make a call upon its inmates. It is one of ceremony, and this of a serious kind, as may be gleaned from the conversation of the two as they ride along the road.

Once outside the suburbs, commences Calderon, saying:

"There can be no doubt that Don Gregorio intends going back to Old Spain. The ship-agent, Silvester, has told me so; and says he's been authorized to charter a ship that will take our friend and his family as far as Havana. Thence they will make a land journey over the Isthmus. And on the gulf side get another ship to carry them across the Atlantic."

"Silvester has told you all that?"

"Every word of it, this very morning."

"A bit of strange intelligence, especially about the chartering of the ship! I can understand what's taking him away; for that's well known."

"Oh, yes. He's disgusted with things as they now go here; and I suppose the *senoritas* are also. No wonder. Since the *gringos* have taken possession of the place it's not very agreeable to show themselves in the streets—nor very safe I should say. Good reason for Don Gregorio's selling out and returning to quieter quarters."

"He has sold out, you think?"

"I am quite sure of it. Silvester told me that, too. And for an enormous sum of money. How much do you suppose?"

"Perhaps \$100,000. His property, with its present increased value, ought to be worth that."

"Whether it ought to be worth or is, it has realized twice the amount!"

"Has Silvester said so?"

"He has."

"Did he tell you who is the purchaser?"

"Some speculating Yankees who fancy they see

far into the future, and think Don Gregorio's pasture-land a good investment. There's a partnership of purchasers, and they've paid the money."

"Paid for it already?"

"Cash down."

"What kind of cash?"

"The best kind—doubloons and dollars—not all in this. Some of it in currency of California—gold-dust and nuggets."

"That's quite as good. *Caspita!* a splendid fortune. All for a piece of poor land, that twelve months ago wasn't worth a tenth-part of the amount! What a pity, Faustino, your acres are already hypothecated! You might have been a millionaire."

"No; they lie too far off. These Yankees have bought Don Gregorio's land for 'town lots', as they call them. In due time, no doubt, they'll cover them with churches and school-houses, though the first building put up should be a prison."

Both laugh together at this modest *jeu d'esprit*, their mirth having a double significance. For neither need be over-satisfied with the sight of a prison.

"By the Virgin!" exclaims De Lara, continuing the conversation. "Don Gregorio has done well, and he may be wise in quitting California. But what the deuce can the old man want with a whole ship to himself?"

"Just the question I asked Silvester."

"What answer did he make to it?"

"Not any. He only shrugged his shoulders, and said, *Quien sabe?* It certainly seems a strange proceeding, when there are plenty of vessels going to Panama, in which he might take passage. Only three of them—himself and the *senoritas!*"

"When it comes to their leaving, there mayn't be so many. If fortune favors me, he need only take passage for two."

"And if fortune favors me, one berth will be sufficient—for Don Gregorio himself."

"From that speech I take it, you are on the same errand as myself? Come, *camarado!* declare it!"

"Declare yours."

"Certainly. I'll make no secret of it to you. Why should there be any between us? I think we've known each other long enough, and well enough, to exchange confidences of every kind. Mine to-day is, that I mean to propose for Don Gregorio's daughter."

"And mine; that I intend doing the same for his granddaughter."

"So we're both in the same boat; and as there's no rivalry between us, we can pull pleasantly together. I've no objection to being your uncle, and giving you a share in this two hundred thousand dollars—in proportion to your claims of kinship."

"I don't want a dollar of the money; only Inez Alvarez. I'm deep in love with her."

"For that matter, neither do I. I'm just as deep in love with Carmen Montijo, and a good deal deeper, no doubt."

"It couldn't be. I'm mad about my girl."

"Not so much as I about mine."

"Ten times more. I could kill Inez if she refused me."

"I shall kill Carmen if she refuses me."

The two men are talking serious, or seem so. Their voices—the tone, the flashing of their eyes, the expression upon their faces, their excited gesticulations, all show that they are in earnest.

In their exchange of passionate speech they have reined up, with their horses' heads together.

Becoming calmer they ride on, and De Lara continues:

"Tell me, Faustino, what hope have you of success—what chance?"

"For that, fair enough, I fancy. You remember the last *fandango*—at Don Gregorio's—after the *herradero*?"

"Certainly I do; I've good reason to remember it. But go on."

"Well, that day I danced twice with Inez; and made twenty sweet speeches to her. Once I went further and squeezed her pretty hand. She wasn't angry, or at all events didn't say so, nor look it. After that, I think I may ask that hand in marriage with a fair presumption of not being refused. What's your opinion?"

"Your chances seem good. What about Don Gregorio? he will have something to say in the matter."

"Too much I fear, and that's just what I do fear. As long as his bit of grazing ground was worth only twenty thousand dollars he was amiable enough. Now that he's sold it for ten times that, he'll be a different man, and likely enough go dead against me."

"Likely enough. It's the way of the world, and therefore you needn't have a special spite against the *Senor Montijo*, on that account. You're sure no one else stands between you and your *amante*? Is there anything in the shape of a rival?"

"Of course there is—a score of them, as you yourself know. The same as with your own *amante*. They're coming and going with both our sweethearts, ever since either was old enough to receive lovers. The last I've heard of, though I hain't seen him, is a young officer, a *guardia marina*, on board the American ship-of-war now lying in the harbor. By the by, there are two of them spoken of—one said to be your rival with Dona Carmen. And may I add, what's been for some time the talk of the town? You may as well know it now, if you don't already."

"What?"

"Why, that this young officer has cut out all Carmen's other admirers—you among the rest."

Bitter words to the ear of Don Francisco de Lara. They bring the color to his cheeks, as if these had been smitten by a switch.

His eyes flashing full of jealous fire, he exclaims:

"If that be so, I'll do as I've said—kill Carmen Montijo. I shall. I swear it by all the saints in heaven and all the devils in hell. I'm in earnest, *camarado*, and mean to act so. Again I say: if it be as you've heard, I'll kill Carmen Montijo. I've the right to her life; since she gave me the right to her love."

"Did she do that—did she tell you she loved you?"

"Not in words, I admit. But there are other signs of assent besides speech and the hand-squeezing you speak of. Carmen Montijo may be cunning. Some call her coquette. All I know is that she has led me to believe she loved me. And if she's been playing

a false game, God help her. She shall rue it one way or the other. This day I'm determined to know the truth. I intend to declare myself in good faith, and offer her my hand in marriage. If she refuse it, then I'll know how things stand, and, by the Virgin, she shall never leave California till accounts are squared between us. She shall find that Francisco de Lara is no fool—no soft spooner to let one of womankind either laugh at or play coquette with him."

"I admire your spirit, *amigo*. I catch courage from it, and will imitate your action, if it turn out that Inez Alvarez has been trifling with me. But let us first know what is to be our fate; which we shall, I suppose, soon after ascending yonder hill. One may be accepted, the other rejected. In that case one of us will be happy, the other wretched. Or both may be accepted; and then we shall both be blessed. Taking things at their worst, that we'll both be refused, what then? Despair, and the Devil, I suppose."

"The last if you like, but not the first. When despair comes to Frank Lara, death will come with it—before and after. But we waste time talking. From what you've told me, there's none to spare. Let us forward and learn our fate!"

From a second pause which they had made, while thus passionately debating, the two horsemen keep on; with stroke of spur urging their horses into a gallop—on the faces of both an expression that speaks of little hope in their hearts, but much of despair and the Devil.

CHAPTER XII.

A PAIR OF SPANISH SENORITAS.

Two young girls standing on the top of a house.

Although on the shores of the South Sea, overlooking San Francisco Bay, it is a house of Spano-Mexican architectural style, with a flat roof—termed *azotea*.

It is the dwelling of Don Gregorio Montijo.

Thus far away from Spain, Don Gregorio is nevertheless a Spaniard, who, ten years before, found his way into Mexico, and afterward to California.

Settling there, he became a *ganadero*, or cattle-grazier—the industry in those days followed by most Californians.

There is proof that he has prospered. His *ganadera* gives this. It extends for several miles along the shore and several leagues inland. A thousand horses and ten thousand horned cattle roam over its grassy slopes.

In the New World Don Gregorio has done well, though he brought something from the Old—sufficient cash to purchase a large tract of pasture-land, and stock it.

No needy adventurer he; but a gentleman by birth, one of Biscay's *bluest blood*, *hidalgos* since the days of the Cid. Besides his ready money he brought to the New World a wife—Biscayan as himself—with a daughter, then just eight years old.

His wife lies buried near the Bay: a tomb-stone seen in the cemetery of the old Dolores Mission commemorating her many virtues.

His daughter is one of the two young ladies standing on the housetop.

Since then he has received an addition to his contracted family circle; the added member being the offspring of another and older daughter; so much older that her child surviving is less than two years younger than her own aunt—a lapse of nigh twenty intervening between the births of Don Gregorio's first-born and last.

This child, now full-grown, is the second of the two on the *azotea*.

The niece is quite as tall as her aunt, though in other respects they differ so widely that one unacquainted with the fact would not think there was the slightest kinship between them.

The aunt, called Carmen—Dona Carmen Montijo—is of pure Biscayan blood, both by the father's and mother's side. From this she derives her blonde complexion, with hair of amber hue. From it she has the blue-gray eye of the Breton—better known as Irish—the Basques and Celts being a kindred race. From it, also, she inherits a smiling face, with just enough of roguery in the smile to cause a *soupeon* of coquettishness. Perhaps only a seeming.

The Biscayan breed gives her a figure of full development, withal in perfect feminine proportion, throughout its undulating outlines. While her mother has transmitted to her what, according to account, she had herself in an eminent degree—beauty.

In the daughter this quality has not deteriorated, but perhaps rather improved. The benignant clime of California has done this; for the soft breezes of the South Sea fan as fair cheeks as were ever kissed by Tuscan or Levantine wind.

It is not necessary to describe the beauty of Dona Carmen Montijo in all its details. A whole chapter might be devoted to her many charms, and still not do them justice. Enough to say that they are beyond cavi, and are so esteemed by scores of Californians. The talk goes that there are men in San Francisco who would dare death for her sake. Some who would do it suicidally—if sure of a smile from her rich red lips to speak approval of the deed.

Idle talk, no doubt; much of it; though not all. One man, we know, would commit murder for her; kill even herself, not caring for the consequences.

And in this same San Francisco there are men who would do almost as much for her niece; though she has neither a blonde complexion, nor blue eyes, nor amber hair.

In all these different; the first "morena" or brunette; the second black as ink, the last as ebony.

But Inez Alvarez is also a beauty; of the type immortalized by many bards; Byron among the number, when he wrote his rhapsody on the "Girl of Cadiz."

She is herself a girl of Cadiz; of which city her father was a native.

The Conde Alvarez, an officer in the Spanish army, serving with his regiment in Biscay, there saw a face that charmed him. It belonged to the daughter of Don Gregorio Montijo—his first-born. The count wooed the Biscayan lady, won and bore her away to his home in Andalusia.

Eighteen years since this event. He and she are no more; their child—an only daughter—alone living to attest they were wedded.

From her father, in whose veins ran Moorish blood, Inez Alvarez has eyes that are jet-black, with lashes

nearly half an inch in length, and above them brows shaped like the moon in the middle of her first quarter. She is in form more slender than Carmen Montijo, quite her equal in height, and in this may yet excel; since she is day by day growing taller.

The death of her parents will account for her being in California. She has come thither to be under the protection of her nearest living relative—Don Gregorio Montijo.

She has been in San Francisco only a short time; and though all the while lovers have been sighing around her, she does not desire to stay. She longs to return to Andalusia.

Her longing is likely to be gratified, as already learnt from the conversation between the two cavaliers, riding along the road. The girls upon the *azotea* are talking on this same subject.

Inez speaks, asking a question:

"Is it really true, *tia*, that we're going back to Spain?"

"Quite true; and I'm sorry for it."

"Why should you be sorry?"

"Why? There are many reasons why."

"Give one."

"I can find twenty."

"One good one will be sufficient."

"They're all good."

"Let me hear them, then."

"First of all, I like California; I love it; its fine climate, and bright blue sky."

"Not a bit brighter or bluer than the sky of Spain."

"Ten times brighter and ten times bluer. The skies of the old world are to those of the new as lead *tapis lazuli*. In that respect neither Spain nor Italy can compare with California. Its seas, too, are superior. Even the boasted Bay of Naples would be but a little pond alongside that noble sheet of water far-stretching before our eyes. Look at it!"

"Looking at it through your eyes, I might think so; not through mine. For my part I see nothing in San Francisco Bay so much to admire."

"But something on it. Come now, confess the truth."

"I don't know what you mean, aunt."

"Oh, you're very innocent, my *Mora*. Walk this way. Stand here, close to the parapet; look over it—out upon the bay. Now do you see anything?"

"I see ships—nothing else."

"I don't want you to see anything else. And of the ships, only one—you know which, I suppose? or shall I point it out? Yonder, afar off, with a flag flying, red, white, and blue. Isn't that something on the Bay of San Francisco?"

"But that don't belong to your bay does it?"

"No matter; it's in it now, and in it, the ship—somebody, that if I mistake not, has very much interested somebody else—a certain *senorita* from Spain."

"You are speaking of the *Senorita Carmen Montijo*?"

"I'm speaking of the *Senorita Inez Alvarez*."

"Your words will answer equally as well for yourself."

"Suppose I admit it and say yes? Well, I will. There is one in yonder ship I am interested in. Nay, more, I admire; ay, *love* him. You see, I'm not ashamed to confess myself in love, though it be a weakness. We Biscayans don't keep secrets, as you Andalusians. For all, you haven't kept yours, *sobrina*, though you've tried hard enough. I saw from the first that you were smitten with that American *guardia marina*, notwithstanding his hair that's just the color of a squash."

"It isn't any thing of the kind. His hair is a thousand times prettier than that of the other *guardia marina* who's taken your fancy, *tia*?"

"Nothing to compare with it. Look at this. There's one of the handsomest curls ever cut from the head of man. Brown and shining like the coat of a fur seal. Isn't it beautiful? I could kiss it over and over again."

While speaking she does kiss it over and over again.

"And look at this," exclaims Inez, in turn, drawing forth a tress and displaying it in the sun. "See now how that shines. It's like tissue of gold. Far handsomer than strings of black thread, and ten times better worth kissing."

And she proceeds to kiss and caress it.

"So—so, my innocent!" exclaims Carmen, "you've been stealing a tress too?"

"As yourself, *tia*."

"And I suppose you've given one in exchange?"

"Have you?"

"I have. To you I make no secret of it—come now, be equally candid with me. Have you really exchanged love-locks?"

"I've done the same as yourself."

"And has your heart gone with the gift? Tell the truth, Inez."

"Ask your own, Carmen, and take its answer for mine."

"Enough; we understand each other, and shall keep the secret to ourselves. Now let's talk of other things; go back to what we began with, about leaving California. You're glad that we're going?"

"Indeed, yes; and I wonder at your not being the same. Dear old Spain, the finest country on earth, and Cadiz the finest city."

"Well, *cada uno a su gusto*. We differ about that. Give me California for a country, and San Francisco for a home, though it isn't much of a city as yet. It will be one day ere long. As it is, I should like to stay here, but that can't be, and there's an end of it. Father has determined on leaving. Indeed, he has already sold the place, so that this house and all you see around it is no longer ours. The lawyers have made out the transfer deeds, and the money has been paid down. So that we're only here on sufferance, and must soon deliver up. We're to take ship to Panama, cross the Isthmus, and over the great Atlantic ocean, once more to renew the old world life with all its stupid ceremonies. I'm sure they will come nigh killing me. I shall sadly miss the fine wild days of California, its rural sports, with their originality and quaint picturesqueness. Oh, I'm sure I shall die of *ennui* soon after reaching Spain. Cadiz will kill me."

"But, Carmen, surely you couldn't be happy here—now that everything is so changed. Why, they say we can scarce walk out with safety, or go into the streets of the town, crowded as they are, with those

rudd fellows who have come to search for gold—Anglo-Saxons, as they call themselves."

"What! you speaking against Anglo-Saxons, and with that tress treasured in your bosom—lying so near your heart?"

"Oh! he is different. He is not Saxon, but of Celtic race, the same as you Biscayans. Besides, he isn't to be ranked with the rabble in red shirts and big boots, though he be born among such people. You know that, *ña*."

"I'm not so sure I do, *sobrina*. I think you do wrong to these red-shirted gentry. Rough as is their exterior, they have gentle hearts under their coarse, home-spun coats. Many of them are true gentlemen—we never had insult from them—not even disrespect. Father wrongs them, too; for it is indeed their presence here that's causing him to quit California, with many others of our old families. Still we live in the *campesina*, not the town, and might long enjoy immunity from meeting "los barbaros," as our people are pleased contemptuously to style them. For my part I love dear old California, and much dislike leaving it. Only to think I shall never behold the brave *vagabundo* mounted on his magnificent steed, careering across the plains, and launching his lazo o'er the horns of the fierce wild bulls, ready to gore him if he but miss his aim. I say it is the finest sight in the world, sweetly exciting in this dull prosaic age. It recalls the heroic days and deeds of the great Conde, the Campeador and Cid. Yes, Inez, in this Transatlantic type, out here on the shores of the South Sea, there is still something to remind one of the old knight-errantry, and the times of the Troubadours."

"Well, yonder are two of your knights-errant, if I mistake not, making this way. Now, *ña*, standing on the azotea of a Californian house, you can fancy yourself on the donjon of an old Spanish castle. Salute and receive them accordingly. Ha! ha! ha!"

The clear, ringing laugh of the Andalusian is not echoed by the Biscayan.

Instead, a frown comes over her face as her eyes rest upon the horsemen—for they are horsemen who are thus pointed out.

"True types of Californian chivalry," adds Inez, ironically.

"True types of Californian villainy," responds Carmen, speaking in earnest.

CHAPTER XIII.

DREADING A CONTRETEMPS.

The hill upon which stands the dwelling of Don Gregorio Montijo is ridge-shaped—being a sort of spur projected from higher ground behind, and trending at right-angles to the sea-beach, where it declines into a low-lying sandbar.

The San Jose road, running southward from the city, crosses it, about half-way between the house and the water's edge, passing the former at some two or three hundred yards' distance.

There is not much inclosure around a California dwelling. And when it is the *casa grande* of a grazing estate, still less; some corrals for the penning and branding of cattle; usually erected in the rear. To these Don Gregorio has added a fence, separating his property from the high road, and penetrated by a gate-entrance directly in front of the house. From this an avenue leads centrally along the ridge. It is strewn with white sea-shells and flanked on either side by a row of *manzanita* bushes, a beautiful indigenous evergreen.

From the inner court of the residence a stone *escalera* ascends to the flat roof, around which runs a parapet breast-high, encircling the *azotea* and rendering it safe for promenade and pleasant dalliance. Some shrubs and flowers in pots give it the perfume and appearance of a garden. It is also the choice post of observation, the view from it being the best.

For the last-named purpose the two young girls are now upon it, having ascended shortly after the hour of breakfast—by Spanish-American custom, eleven o'clock.

That they do not intend remaining long on the roof is evident from their dress. They are costumed for the saddle, with hats of bicuña wool on their heads, riding-whips in hand, and spurs on their heels. While in the courtyard below is a group of four horses, saddled and bridled, impatiently pawing the flagstones.

As all four saddles are such as should be ridden by men, it may be supposed only men are to mount them, and that the ladies' horses have not yet been led out. This will naturally be the conjecture of a stranger to Spanish California.

With one accustomed to its fashions, the deduction will be different. Looking at the spurred *senoritas* upon the housetop, and seeing the saddled horses below, he will conclude that two of the latter will soon be mounted by the former; in the mode by which the famed Duchesse de Berri was accustomed to astonish the Parisians.

The other two horses having larger, and somewhat coarser, saddles, are evidently intended to be besridden by gentlemen, so that the cavalcade will be symmetrically composed—two and two of each sex.

From their position the two observers can see the fast-increasing city of San Francisco, and the shipping in the harbor. This is north-east and a little to their left. Other vessels ride at anchor on the bay in front of them. But the war-ship that has been a topic of their conversation is anchored far out—in a southerly direction, and a little to their right.

Up to this time the eyes of both ladies—Carmen and Inez—have been continuously bent upon her, as is they expected to see a boat put off from her side. It is only on Inez casting a stray glance along the town road that she sees the two men, whose approach has changed the topic of conversation.

After delivering these speeches, so nearly alike in sound, yet so opposite in sentiment, they remain for a time silent, their eyes turned toward the approaching horsemen. These are still more than a mile off, and only distinguishable as two men mounted and wearing *mangas*—one scarlet, the other sky-blue.

Despite the distance, it is evident, from their speech, that the ladies have identified both. Still more when Dona Carmen, as if mechanically, pronounces the names:

"Francisco de Lara and Faustino Calderon."

The frown that came over her face on first seeing

them is still there. And stays, as she continues to speak of them.

"Do you think they are coming here?" she asks. "It is very likely," rejoins Inez. "I should say almost certain."

"I wonder what can be bringing them—to-day of all days?"

"You need not wonder at that," says Inez, in jocular tone. "I can tell what one of them wants. Don Francisco's errand is to have a look at the mistress of this mansion."

"And Don Faustino's to have a look at her niece, no doubt."

"He's quite welcome to look at me till he strains his eager eyes out. His looks won't make any impression upon me."

"I'm sorry I can't say the same of Don Francisco. His looks do make an impression on me, and one far from favorable."

"It wasn't always so, aunt."

"No, I admit that. I only wish it had been, for then I shouldn't need to fear him."

"Fear him! Surely you're not afraid of him?"

"Well, no—not exactly that—still—"

She answers slowly in disjointed phrases, as she speaks hanging her head. She has evidently some reason for reticence; some secret she hesitates disclosing.

A sudden change comes over her countenance; and leaning closer to Inez, she says:

"*Sobrina*, can I trust you with a confidence?"

"Why should you ask, *ña*? You've already intrusted me with one, in telling me you love Don Eduardo Crozier."

"Now I give you another in telling you I once loved Don Francisco de Lara."

"Indeed!"

"No, no," rejoins Carmen, quickly, and as if half repenting the confession. "Not loved him. That's not true. I only came very near it."

"And now?"

"I hate him!"

"But why do you hate him? What has changed you?"

"That's easily answered. Listen, and you shall have the explanation. When I first met him, I was younger than I am now. A mere girl, full of girlish fancies—romantic as called. They may not be gone yet, not all. But what remains no longer turn toward Francisco de Lara, I thought him handsome, and in a sense he is so. In person, you will admit he is all man may or need be—a Hyperion. But in soul—ah! there he is a satyr. I only discovered this when I became better acquainted with the man. Then I hated him; I hate him still."

"But why should you fear him?"

Carmen does not reply, promptly. Clearly she has not yet given the whole of her confidence. There is part of it held back.

Inez, whose sympathies are now enlisted, presses for the explanation. She does so entreatingly, in the language of affection.

"Carmen—dear Carmen! tell me what it is? Have you ever given him a claim to call you his *novia*?"

"Never! not any thing of the kind. He has no claim, nor I any compromise. The only thing I've reason to regret is having listened to some flattering speeches, without resenting them."

"Piff! what does that signify? Why, Don Faustino has flattered me some scores of times—called me all sorts of endearing names; does so whenever we two are together alone. I only laugh at him."

"Ah! Faustino Calderon is not Francisco de Lara. In your admirer there is a little of the ludicrous; in mine there is a great deal of danger. But let us cease discussing their characters. The question is, are they coming here?"

"I think there can be no question about it. They have no doubt heard that we are going away, and are about to honor us with a farewell visit."

"Would it were only that; but visit of whatever kind it is extremely ill-timed, and may be embarrassing."

"Let them come; who cares?—I don't."

"But I do. If father were at home I might not so much; but just now I don't desire to see Don Francisco alone, still less in the company of Don Eduardo. They're both *demonios* in a different way, and sure there would be trouble between them."

"Let us hope that our friends from the ship will not arrive till our shore friends—or enemies, rather—have taken their departure."

"But they will; they are on the way now. Look yonder!"

She points to the man-of-war. There is a boat in the water, down under her side. The sun reflected from wet oar-blades shows this boat to be in motion, as it gradually parts from the ship, and is seen coming toward the shore. The rowers, all dressed alike, with the measured stroke of their oars, proclaim it a man-of-war's boat.

They are the guests expected—the two young officers whom Don Gregorio, not displeased with certain delicate attentions they have been paying to the female members of his family, has invited to ride out along with and afterward return to dine with them.

It is not the first time they have been there, not the first to stretch their limbs under the *ganadero's* dining-table. But it is to be the last—at least while that table is spread in California. They are on their way to pay a parting visit.

There has been talk of renewing the acquaintance at Cadiz, when the Crusader goes there, which she is expected to do. But that is a place far off, and the day distant. Still is it a hook on which to hang a hope—a cheerful, soothing expectation. Else Carmen Montijo and Inez Alvarez would not be so high-hearted at the prospect of a leave-taking now so near.

Less painful than pleasant; it might have been all the latter, but for what they see on the opposite side. There is something that threatens to mar the sweet pain of their parting—those cavaliers coming from the town.

"They will meet—must!" says Carmen.

"Let them," rejoins Inez; "what if they do?"

"What? they may quarrel. Oh! I am sure they will."

"Don't fear for that, *ña*. If they should there's no danger to us. You such a believer in the romantic—stickler for old knight-errantry! Why, instead of trembling and regretting, you should be glad. Look there! Lovers coming from all sides, suitors by land,

and suitors by sea! No lady of the troubadour times ever had such a chance; none was ever honored by such a rivalry!"

"Inez, you don't know the danger."

"There is none. If they come into collision and have a quarrel, let them. I have no fear for mine. If Willie Cadwallader isn't a match for Faustino Calderon, then he's no match or mate for me, and never will be!"

"*Sobrina*! you astonish me. I never knew you were such a *demonia*. Your Moorish blood, I suppose. Your words make me almost as wicked as yourself. It isn't for that I'm afraid. I've as much confidence in my lover as you in yours. No fear that Edward Crozier will cower before Francisco De Lara. If he do, I shall take back my heart a second time, and carry it unscathed to Cadiz!"

CHAPTER XIV.

FACE TO FACE.

The horsemen coming from the town side do not see the boat; nor can the crew of the latter see them. The sand-spit is between the two parties.

They are approaching at a like rate of speed, for although the horses appear to be in a gallop, it is only a fancy gait, fashionable among Spanish Californians, its purpose to exhibit equestrian skill. The two horsemen have looked up the hill, seen heads on the housetop, and know that ladies' eyes are upon them. Surreptitiously goaded by the spur, their steeds plunge and curvet, apparently advancing at a rapid rate, but in reality slow as turtles.

At length both parties disappear from the eyes of those on the *azotea*; they have gone under the brow of the hill, which, overhanging for a short distance, shuts out a view of the road, as also the strip of sandy shore.

Unseen from above, the man-o-war's boat beaches, and the two officers spring out upon the strand.

One of them, turning, says something to the coxswain, who has remained in the stern sheets with the tiller ropes held in hand.

It is an order with instructions about when and where the boat is to attend them for their return to the ship.

"At the town pier," Crozier is heard to say, for it is Crozier who commands.

This order given, the boat shoves off, and is rowed back toward the ship, while the two officers commence climbing the hill, and soon get upon the shore road.

At the same time the horsemen are ascending from the opposite side.

Soon both parties again come within view of those on the *azotea*.

The men on horseback cease showing off, as if satisfied with the impression they must have already made. They now approach in tranquil gait, with an air of subdued triumph—the mock-modesty of the matador, who with blood-stained sword bends meekly before the box where beauty sits smiling approbation.

The two pedestrians climb up the hill less ceremoniously, glad to stretch their legs upon land—"shake the knots out of them," as the junior gleefully remarks; they scale the steep as if swarming up shrouds. Not silent, either, but shouting and laughing like a couple of school-boys abroad for an afternoon's holiday.

Once within view of the house, they bring their boisterous humor under restraint—at sight of those heads appearing above the roof. For they know to whom they belong, and see that the faces are turned toward them.

At the same instant the horsemen see the heads too, and observe that the heads are not turned toward them. On the contrary, they are averted, the ladies looking in the opposite direction.

Some chagrin in this, after all their grand caracoling, their feats of equestrianism that must have been witnessed by the fair spectators.

At what are these now gazing?

Before either can make answer in speech, both have it before their eyes—in the shape of two midshipmen.

Like themselves the young officers have gained the summit of the ridge, and are advancing toward Don Gregorio's gate. It is midway between; and keeping on at the same rate of speed, they will meet directly in front of it.

Neither pair has ever before set eyes on the other. For all this there is an expression on the faces of the four that tells of cognizance, if not identification, and cognizance of a kind far from favorable.

Calderon says to Lara, *sotto voce*:

"The American *guardia marina*."

Cadwallader whispers to Crozier:

"The fellows we've heard about—our rivals, Ned; like ourselves, I suppose, going to visit the girls."

De Lara makes no response to Calderon. Neither does Crozier to Cadwallader. There is not time. All are now close up to the gate, and there is only its breadth between them.

They have arrived at the same instant of time, and simultaneously make stop. Face to face, silence on both sides; not a word exchanged. But looks equally expressive, glances that speak the language of jealous rivalry; anger on both sides, with difficulty suppressed!

It is a question of precedence as to who shall first pass into the entrance. Their hesitancy does not come of courtesy, but the reverse. The men on horseback look contemptuously, scornfully down on those afoot. Threateningly, too, as if they had thoughts of riding over and trampling them under the hoofs of their horses.

No doubt they would like to do it, and might possibly try were the pedestrians unarmed. But they are not. Crozier carries a pistol, Cadwallader his dirk, both conspicuously outside their uniforms.

Thus armed, to offer them rudeness might be dangerous, without riding over them. Neither is attempted.

For a time—several seconds in duration—the rivals stand *vis-a-vis*, neither venturing to advance.

Around them is a nimbus of angry electricity that needs but a spark to kindle it into furious flame. A single word will do it.

This spoken, and two of the four may never enter Don Gregorio's gate—at least not alive.

It is not spoken. The only words are from Crozier to Cadwallader. Aloud; for he is not caring what effect they may have upon the others.

"Come along. There's something better before us—than standing still—shallying here. Come along, Will!"

Crozier's speech cuts the Gordian knot, and the officers, gliding in through the gateway, move on along the avenue.

With faces turned toward the house they there see other faces smilingly awaiting them.

They have confidence that the smiles are for them.

In triumph Crozier draws out the treasured tress, and fastens it in his cap, behind the gold band. It falls over his shoulder like a cataract of liquid amber.

Cadwallader does likewise; and from his cap soon also streams a tress, like what it is, a lock of long black hair.

The two upon the housetop see, and approve the act.

They show their approval by imitating it. Each raises a hand to her riding-hat; and when these come down, a curl of hair is seen hanging over the *toquillas*—one chestnut brown, the other silvery gold.

Scarce is this love telegraphy exchanged, when the two Californians come riding up the avenue at full speed.

Though lingering at the gate, and still afar off, they have observed the affair of the tresses, and cannot mistake the symbolism meant.

Exasperated beyond bounds, De Lara can no longer control himself, and cares not what may come.

At his instigation, Calderon spurs on by his side, the two tearing furiously along. Their purpose is evident: to force the pedestrians from the path, and so humiliate them in the eyes of the *senoritas*.

On his side Crozier remains cool, admonishing Cadwallader to do the same. He feels the power of possession, assured by those smiles that the citadel is theirs. It is for the outsiders to make the assault.

"Give a clear gangway, Will," he says, "and let them pass. We can talk to the gentlemen afterward."

Both step back among the *manzanitas*, and the *ginees* go galloping past, De Lara on Crozier's side scowling down at the officer as if he would annihilate him with a look.

The scowl is returned with interest, though Crozier refrains from speech.

On the other side of the avenue the action is a little different. The young mid, full of sailor deviltry, determines on having his lark. He sees the chance, and can not restrain himself.

As Calderon sweeps past he draws his dirk, and pricks the horse in the hip.

The animal, maddened by the pain, bounds to one side, and then shoots off at increased speed, still further lightened by the fierce "carajos" of his master, and the mocking laugh sent after him by the mid.

Under the walls the two horsemen come to a halt; neither having made much by their rude bit of bravadoism. And they know they will now have a reckoning to settle—at least De Lara does. On the brow of Crozier coming up, he can read the determination to call him to account.

He is not flurried about this. On the contrary, he has courted it, knowing himself a skilled swordsman and dead shot, remembering that he has already killed his man; he can await with equanimity the challenge he has provoked.

It is not fear that has brought the pallor to his cheeks and set the dark seal upon his brow. Both spring from a different passion. More pronouncedly observable in his eyes as he turns them toward the housetop.

The ladies are still there, looking down.

Saluting, he says:

"Can we have the honor of an interview with the *senoritas*?"

Carmen does not make immediate answer. A spectator of all that has passed, she has observed the hostile attitude between the two sets of visitors. To receive them at the same time will be now more than embarrassing. With passions roused to such a pitch it must end in a personal encounter.

Her duty is clear. She is mistress of the house, representing her father in his absence. The officers are there by invitation. Remembering this, she no longer hesitates.

"Not now, Don Francisco De Lara. Not to-day; we must beg of you to excuse us."

"Indeed! Will it be deemed discourteous in me to ask why we are denied?"

It is discourteous, and so Dona Carmen deems it. Though she does not tell him as much in words, he can understand it from her reply.

"You are quite welcome to know the reason. We have an engagement."

"Oh! an engagement!"

"Yes, an engagement," she rejoins, her tone now showing irritation. "Those gentlemen you see are our guests. My father has invited them to spend the day with us."

"Oh! your father has invited them? How very good of Don Gregorio Montijo extending hospitality to *gringos*! And Dona Carmen has added her entreaties, no doubt?"

"*Santissima!*" she exclaims, no longer able to control her indignation. "Your speech is impertinent—insulting. I shall listen to it no longer."

Saying this, she steps back, disappearing behind the parapet, where Inez has already concealed herself after a similar curt dialogue with Calderon.

De Lara, a lurid glare in his eyes, sits in his saddle as if in a stupor.

He is aroused from it by a voice, Crozier's, saying:

"You appear anxious to make an apology. You can make it to me."

"*Carajo!*" exclaims De Lara, starting, and glaring at the speaker. "Who are you?"

"One who demands an apology for your rude behavior."

"You will not get it."

"Satisfaction then?"

"That to your heart's content."

"I shall have it, too. Your card, *senor*."

"Here, take it! Yours?"

The bits of pasteboard are exchanged, after which De Lara, casting another glance up to the azotea,

where he sees nothing but blank walls, turns his horse's head, and, spitefully plying the spur, gallops back down the avenue, Calderon close following.

CHAPTER XV.

IN SEARCH OF A SECOND.

CRESTFALLEN, the caballeros continue on toward the road.

De Lara feels his discomfiture the keenest. His heart is harrowed with mingled emotions—passions of many kinds, all evil.

After clearing the entrance-gate, he gives a glance in the direction of the dwelling whose hospitality has been denied him.

But there he sees nothing to soothe him; on the contrary, something still further to afflict. Four horses are coming out through the saguan, conducted by grooms. They are saddled and ready for the road.

To the eyes of the Californian their caparison tells of an excursion, not a journey. And in the saddles, so much alike, there is yet enough of difference to tell that two of them are intended for ladies.

A single glance gives this information to both of the cavaliers. Now they know why they could not be received. The *senoritas* are going out on a ride—a *paseo de campo*—along with their rivals!

The excursionists, of course, will have every opportunity of doing what they may desire. They will get separated two and two; and there can be no doubt as to how this partition will be made. Crozier to pair off with Carmen, the other with Inez. Thus they will ride unmolested, unobserved, converse without fear of being overheard, clasp hands without danger of being seen; perhaps exchange kisses! Oh, the dire, damnable jealousy!

Frank Lara feels it in every vein. Don Faustino, too.

After gazing awhile at the house, the horses and groom—at the preparations for mounting, made in a magnificent style—looking back, as Satan when expelled from Paradise—both spur down the hill, and are soon out of sight.

At its bottom they again halt, De Lara drawing up first. Facing to his companion, he says:

"We're in for a fight, Faustino; both of us."

"Not both. I don't think I'm called upon to challenge that young *guardia marina*. He's but a boy, without a single hair on his face."

"He's been man enough to insult you; and if I mistake not, you'll find him man enough to meet you. But, come; we're wasting time. A duel's a thing won't do to dream over. Do you intend to fight or not?" De Lara spoke in hot fervor and impatience, evidently angered at the other's apathy or cowardice.

"I'd rather not," replied Calderon, hesitatingly. "That is, if the thing can be arranged without. Do you think it can, De Lara?"

"Of course it can; your thing, as you call it. But not without disgrace to you."

"Well, if you think I ought to call him out, and must, why, I suppose I must. But I never fired a pistol in my life, and am only second rate with the rapier. I can handle a *machete* with most, or a *cuchilla*; but these weapons won't be admitted in a duel between gentlemen. I suppose the sailor fellow claims to be one."

"Undoubtedly he does; and with good reason. An officer belonging to an American man-of-war would call you out for questioning such a claim. But, come, Faustino! You use the small sword with considerable skill. I've seen you at Woberto's fencing school."

"Yes, I took lessons there."

"Well, let that be your weapon."

"But how can it, if I am to be the challenger?"

"You needn't be. There's a way to get over that. Those fellows are not going straight back to their ship. They'll be in the town to-night for a cruise, as they call it, and you'll be sure to meet your man. Go up to him, and in some way insult him grossly. Give him a cuff, spit in his face, anything; and then wait for him to challenge you."

"*Currambo!* I'll do as you say."

"That's right. Now let us think of what's before us. As we're both to be principals, we can't stand seconds to one another. I know one who'll act for me. Have you got a friend that will do the same for you?"

"Don Manuel Lozada; he's the only one I can think of."

"Don Manuel will do. He's a cool hand, and knows all the regulations of the duello. But he's not at home to-day. As I chance to know, he's gone to a *funcion de gallos* at Punta Arena, beyond the Dolores Mission. By this time he'll be in the cockpit."

"Why can't we go there? or had we better send?"

"Better send, I think. Time's precious; at least mine is. You know I must be at the *monte-table* as soon as the lamps are lit. If I'm not, the bank will go begging, and we may lose half our customers. Besides, I have my own second to look up; which must be done before I lay hand upon the cards. What time is it? I've not got my watch with me."

"Twelve and a quarter past," answers Calderon, consulting his *reloja*.

"Only that. Then there's plenty of time for us to get to Punta Arena, and see a main or two. Don Manuel has a big bet on his *pardo*. I'd like to stake a doubloon or two myself on the same cock. Yes, on reflection, we'd better go ourselves. It'll be the surest way to secure the services of Lozada."

At this the two gamblers moved off, taking the road for Punta Arena.

Their jealous anger still unappeased, they spur their horses into a gallop, riding as if for life, on an errand of death!

CHAPTER XVI.

A SHIP WITHOUT SAILORS.

AMONG the vessels lying in the harbor of San Francisco is one athwart whose stern may be read the name *El Condor*.

She is a ship of small size—some five or six hundred tons—devoted to peaceful commerce, as may be told by certain insignia intelligible to seamen.

The name will suggest a South American vessel, Ecuadorian, Peruvian, Bolivian or Chilian, since the bird from which she has been baptized is found in all these countries. Colombia and the Argentine States can also claim it.

There is no need to guess at the particular one to

which the ship in question belongs. The flag down over her taffrail tells it by a symbolism known to those who take an interest in national insignia.

It is a tricolor—the orthodox and almost universal red, white and blue—the colors not as in the French—in three vertical stripes—but disposed in two horizontal bands, the lower red, the upper equally divided between the white and blue; the last next to the staff, with a single five-pointed star set centrally in its field.

This disposition proclaims the ship to be Chilian.

She is not the only vessel of this nationality in the harbor of San Francisco. Several other craft are there that hoist the same ensign; brigs, barques, schooners and ships. For the spirited little Republic of Chili is prosperous as enterprising; and its colors may be seen all over the Pacific. With its population of skilled miners, it has been among the first of foreign states in sending a large representative force to cradle the gold placers of California. Not only are its ships lying in the bay, but its *guasos* and *gambusinos* in goodly number tread the streets of the town; while many of the dark-eyed damsels, who from piazzas and balconies greet the passer-by with smiles, are those seductive little *chilenas* known to every sailor who has visited Valparaiso.

But we are wandering away from the ship *El Condor*. Let us return to and go aboard of her.

We see not much there that can strictly be called Chilian. But little besides the ship herself and the captain commanding; not commanding sailors, for there is not a single one aboard, either hailing from Chili or elsewhere. They have abandoned her—gone off to the gold-diggings.

Arriving at San Francisco in the heat of the placer-fever, they preferred seeking fortune with pick, shovel and pan, to handling tarry ropes at ten dollars a month.

Almost on the instant of the ship dropping anchor they deserted her to a man, leaving her skipper alone, with only the cook for a companion.

Neither is the last Chilian, but African. No more are the two monkeys, observed gamboling about the deck: for Chili—too far from the tropic zone—knows not the *quadramana*.

Scarcely anything seen upon the Condor would proclaim her a South American ship. Above all, nothing in her cargo, for a cargo there is. She has just arrived from a trading voyage among the South Sea Isles, extending to the Indian Archipelago. Thence her lading, a varied assortment, consisting of tortoise-shells, spices, Manilla cigars, and such other commodities as may be collected on a trip to the Oriental Islands. Hence also the two monkeys—large creatures of the *myas* kind, brought from Borneo.

Only a small portion of the cargo has been intended for the Californian port; this already landed. The rest remains in her hold, awaiting transport to Valparaiso.

How soon the Condor will arrive there, or take departure from San Francisco, is a question that even her captain cannot answer. If asked, he would most probably reply, "*Quien sabe?*" And if further pressed, he might point to his deserted decks, offering that as the explanation.

Captain Antonio Lautanas is a Chilian of the pure Spanish-American type—and being this, he takes things coolly, bearing his disappointments with a patient resignation, that would be quite incomprehensible to either English or Yankee skipper.

With a broad-brimmed Manilla hat shading his thin, swarth features from the sun, he sits all day upon his quarter, or stands resting his elbows on the capstan head, doing one of two things: either rolling paper *cigarritos*, or smoking them.

He only varies this occupation by playing with his pet monkeys. They are a male and female, full of fun in their uncouth fashion; and Captain Lautanas takes this out of them by occasionally touching their noses with the red end of his *cigarrito*, and seeing them scamper off, surprised at the singular, and to them somewhat painful, effect of fire.

His meals are served regularly three times a day, and his cook—a dinky, black as the tar upon the ratlin ropes—after having served them, returns to an idleness equaling his own. He, too, has his diversion with the monkeys, approaching much nearer to them in appearance; and, perhaps, more congenial as a playmate.

At times Captain Lautanas takes his gig and rows himself ashore. But not to search for sailors. He knows that would be an idle errand. True, there are plenty of them in San Francisco; scores seen in the streets, and other scores in the taverns and restaurants. But they are all rollicking, and if not rich soon hope to be. Not a man of them could be coaxed on board the Condor or any other ship for a wage less than would make her voyage unprofitable to the owners.

As Captain Lautanas is not only master but proprietor of his own craft, he has no intention of making an idle trip; and the Condor can not take a flight until times change. When this may be, and she can spread her canvas wings for Valparaiso, he has not the remotest idea. He only goes ashore to meet other skippers with ships crewless as his own; take a drink with them, smoke *cigarritos*, and exchange condolence on their common destitution.

On a certain day—that on which we are introduced to him—he has not sculled himself ashore; but abides upon his vessel, there awaiting the arrival of one who has sent him a message.

Although San Francisco is fast being transformed to an American town, there is among its newspapers a small sheet printed in Spanish—by name *El Diario*. In this, Captain Lautanas has advertised his vessel, as a ship open for freight or passage, bound for Valparaiso, and to call at intermediate ports, Panama among the number.

The "*aviso*" has directed reference to be made aboard the ship herself, and to her captain, Don Antonio Lautanas.

In answer to it a letter has been received, and an appointment made by one who has promised to be aboard at 12 M. This is the day appointed.

Though a stranger to San Francisco, Captain Lautanas has some knowledge of his correspondent; at least he has heard that a gentleman of the same name as that signed to the letter is a large landed proprietor, whose acres lie contiguous to the town, of late quadrupled in value—by the gold immigration. What this gentleman may want with him or his ship Captain Lautanas can not tell, nor guess.

But, while standing with elbow resting on the capstan, and puffing away at his paper cigarrito, he is endeavoring to do the latter.

Help he has, from something heard on his last visit to the town, made two days before; there in Spanish circles the talk was that the *haciendado* in question has lately sold his land and realized an immense sum by the sale—half a million mentioned. Furthermore, that being a Spaniard, and neither Mexican nor Californian, he was about to take back his family, as also his household goods, thus aggrandized, to the place whence, two years before, he had brought them. Then, as the story went, they could have been stowed in a single state-room, or at most two; now they might require a whole ship, or a goodly portion of one.

El Condor has still plenty of room to spare. Her hold is not half full; and her cabin has accommodation for several passengers. Might it be for this his correspondent is seeking an interview?

Captain Lautanas asks the question of himself. It pleases him to think it may be.

While indulging in this hope, he sees that which for a time puts an end to his speculations.

It is a shore boat, with a single pair of rowers, and a gentleman, evidently a landsman, seated in the stern sheets. And as evidently steering straight for *El Condor*.

Captain Lautanas steps to the side of his vessel; and, standing in the waist awaits the arrival of his visitor.

As the boat draws near he sees a gentleman of Spanish features, dressed in semi-Californian costume, and is now pretty sure it is he who has answered his advertisement in the newspaper.

He can no longer have a doubt when the Californian, having ascended the man-ropes, and stepped down upon the deck, hands him a card, bearing the name of his correspondent.

CHAPTER XVII.

PASSAGES TO PANAMA.

He who has thus presented himself to Captain Lautanas is a man, in age well up to sixty, and somewhat above medium height. Taller than he appears, through a slight stoop in the shoulders. His step, though not tottering, shows vigor impaired; and on his countenance are the traces of recent ill health, with strength not yet restored.

His complexion is clear, rather reddish, and in health might be more so; while his hair, both on head and chin—the latter a long, flowing beard—now snow-white—could never have been dark; more likely of the color called sandy.

This, with grayish-blue eyes, and features showing some points of Celtic conformation, would argue him either not a Spaniard, or one belonging to the province of Biscay.

The last he is: for the correspondent of Captain Lautanas is Don Gregorio Montijo.

The illness which has made inroads upon his health, enfeebling a once-vigorous frame, has been in part mental suffering caused by the death of his wife, but more from an intermittent fever, the effects of which are still observable in eyes somewhat sunken.

It is partly in hope of getting his strength restored that he is returning to Spain; though other reasons, already assigned, have contributed to the resolve.

Perhaps it is the near prospect of the change that now makes him high-hearted; or it may be the recent grand stroke of good fortune in having realized such a large sum by the sale of his estate. Whatever the cause, there is a sparkle in his eye as he steps on board the ship that tells a tale of cheerfulness rather than despondency.

No wonder at this. A man who has just sold a tract of land for \$300,000, which twelve months before was worth only a small portion of the sum, could scarce be other than cheerful. And besides having made the sale, received the money, if not in gold coin, in its equivalent, gold-dust and nuggets, the then common currency of California.

No doubt it has something to do with Don Gregorio's being in good spirits. For he is, as shown by his smiling face as he steps on board.

His presenting the card is to save speech in the formality of introduction. After which, he says, "Captain Lautanas, I presume?" then stands to recover his breath, taken from him by the effort made in climbing up the companion.

"*Si, señor*," responds the master of the *Condor*, bowing with becoming humility before a man reputedly so rich. "*A servicio de v.*," he adds; and after this proffer of service, waits to hear what may be required of him.

"Well, *capitán*, having seen your advertisement in the *Diario*, I wrote an answer to it. Have you received my letter?"

"*Si, señor*."

"*Muy bien!* I thought it best to come aboard; so that I might be made acquainted with all particulars. Your ship is for freight or passage?"

"Either, *señor*."

"You advertise bound for Valparaiso, and intermediate ports?"

"*Si, señor*."

"Have you any passengers?"

"Not as yet."

"How many can you take?"

"Well, to speak truth, my craft is not intended to carry passengers. She's a trading vessel, as you may see. But if you'll come with me to the cabin, you can judge for yourself. There's a snug little saloon, and sleeping accommodations for six; two of them state-rooms that will serve, if need be, for ladies."

"That will do. Now about freight. Have you any cargo aboard?"

"A portion of my ship is already occupied."

"That won't signify to me. I suppose you have enough room left for something that weighs less than a ton and isn't of any great bulk. Say it will take half a score of cubic feet. Can you find storage for that?"

"*Si, señor*. That and two hundred times as much."

"*Bueno!* And also three passengers: a gentleman and two ladies—in short, myself and daughters; at least one of them is; the other is my grand-daughter. Can you find accommodations for us all?"

"Will the *Señor Montijo* step into the *Condor's* cabin, and see for himself?"

"Of course."

Captain Lautanas leads down the stairway, his visitor following.

The saloon is examined; after it the state-rooms, right and left.

The examination proves satisfactory.

"Just the thing," says Don Gregorio, speaking in soliloquy. "It will do," he adds, addressing himself to the skipper. "And now, Captain Lautanas, about terms—what are they to be?"

"That, *señor*, will depend on what is wanted. Where do you wish me to take you?"

"Panama. I must make landing there. It is one of the ports mentioned in your advertisement?"

"It is, *señor*."

"Well, for the freight—as I've told you, about a ton—and the three passengers—how much?"

"The price, *señor*, will depend upon the class of freight. Is it gold? From your description I suppose it must be."

Don Gregorio pauses before making reply. Notwithstanding his great riches, he is somewhat near, if not niggardly. And not the less for these being but recently acquired. He would like to have his gold transported to Panama, cheaply as possible. At the same time he wishes to get it there in safety, and to do so he has determined to take it secretly. This his principal reason for securing passage on a trading-ship, instead of by one of the regular lines already commenced running between San Francisco and the Isthmus. He has heard that these are crowded with rough miners on their return home; many of them queer characters, little better than robbers. He dreads trusting his golden treasure among them, and still more his girls. He has faith, however, in the honor and honesty of Captain Antonio Lautanas; having heard all about the Chilean skipper from his friend ashore—one Don Tomas Silvestre.

Under the circumstances, and with such a man, it will not do to drive too hard a bargain; and Don Gregorio, thus reflecting, confesses his freight to be gold.

"In coin?" asks the captain.

"No. Dust, and placer grains."

"All the same. As the *señor* must know, the terms for such freight are special. Therefore, I shall ask \$2,000 for taking the gold, and \$200 each for the passages."

"It is a large price," says Don Gregorio. "But I suppose I must agree to it. When will you be ready to sail?"

"I am ready now, *señor*—that is, if—"

"If what?"

The captain, remembering his crewless ship, does not make immediate answer.

"If," says Don Gregorio, "you're calculating on any delay from me, you needn't. I can have everything on board in three or four days—a week at most."

The skipper is silent, thinking of excuses. He dislikes losing the chance of such a profitable lading; and yet knows he cannot well enter into the contract for want of hands to work his ship.

There seems no help for it but to confess his shortcomings. Perhaps Don Gregorio will wait till he can get a crew. The more likely, since nearly every other ship in the port is in a similar predicament.

"*Señor*," he says at length, "my ship is at your service, and I should be pleased and proud to have you and your ladies as my passengers. But there's a little difficulty to be got over before I can sail from San Francisco."

"Clearance duties—port dues to be paid. You want the money advanced, I presume? Well, I shall not object to prepaying it in part. How much do you require?"

"Thank you, *Señor Montijo*. It's not anything of that kind. Although far from rich, thank Heaven neither I nor my craft is under embargo. I could sail out of this harbor in half an hour, but for want of—"

"Want of what?" asks the *ex-ganadero*, in some surprise.

"Sailors."

"What! have you no sailors?"

"I'm sorry to say, not one."

"I thought it strange, noticing nobody aboard except that black fellow. I supposed your sailors had gone ashore."

"So have they, *señor*; and intend staying there. *Caspio!* that's the trouble. They've gone off to the gold-diggings; every one of them, except my negro cook. No doubt I should have lost him, but he knows that California is now in the United States, and fears that some Southern Yankee might take a fancy to enslave him, or that he might meet his old master; for he has been a slave already."

"How vexatious all this is!" says Don Gregorio. "I suppose I shall have to look out for another ship?"

"I fear you will not find one much better provided with sailors. In that respect, to use a professional phrase, we're all in the same boat."

"You assure me of that?"

"I do, *señor*."

"Captain Lautanas, I can trust you. And now let me tell you, I am not here without knowing something of yourself. You have a friend in San Francisco—Don Tomas Silvestre?"

"I have the honor of Don Tomas's friendship."

"Well, he has recommended you in such terms that I can fully rely upon your integrity. And trusting to it, I'll make known to you why I wish to take passage in your ship."

The Chilean skipper bows thanks for the compliment, and silently awaits the proffered confidence.

"I have just sold my property here—receiving for it \$300,000 in gold-dust, the same I've spoken of as your freight. It is now lying at my house, some three miles from town. As you must be aware, this place is at present the rendezvous of all the scoundrels collected from the shores of the Pacific. As also a goodly number from those of the Atlantic. They are living here in a state of lawlessness. Such judges as they have are almost as great criminals as those brought before them. Under the circumstances I feel anxious about my treasure; which you won't wonder at. Any hour a band of these outlaws may take it into their heads to strip me of it, or at all events attempt to do so. Therefore I wish to get it aboard a ship—one where it will be safe, and

whose captain I can rely upon. Don Tomas Silvestre has assured me I can trust you. Now you know all."

"*Si, Señor*," is the simple response of the Chilean.

He is about to add that it will be safe enough so far as he can protect it, when Don Gregorio hinders him by continuing:

"My intention is to return to Spain, of which I am a native—to Cadiz, where I have some property. What I intended doing anyhow. But now I want to take departure at once. As a Spaniard, Captain Lautanas, I need not point out to you, who are of the same race, that the society here cannot be congenial, now that the rowdies of the United States and the convicts of Australia have become the possessors of the place. You understand me, *capitán*?"

"Perfectly."

"It is exceedingly awkward your not having a crew. Can't something be done to procure one?"

"The only thing would be to offer extra pay. There are plenty of sailors in San Francisco, for they're not all gone to the gold-diggings. Though most that remain are worthless, drunken fellows. Still it is probable that some good ones might be engaged were the wages made tempting to them. No doubt an advertisement in the *Diario* would get as many as are needed for manning the *Condor*."

"How much would it all amount to?"

"For the trip to Valparaiso, possibly a thousand dollars, *señor*."

"Will it suit your purpose if I pay the proportion of that as far as Panama?"

"Yes; on those terms I agree to get sailors."

"And to take no other passengers but ourselves?"

"No others, *señor*."

"In that case I shall be answerable for the extra wages. Any thing to get away from this place, of which, as I've told you, I'm heartily tired."

"Then you authorize me to insert the *aviso*?"

"I do," answers Don Gregorio.

"*Basta!*" rejoins the skipper. "And now, *señor*, you may make your preparations for embarking."

"I haven't any to make. Nearly all has been done already. It's only to get our personal baggage aboard, the freight spoken of. By the way," adds the *ex-ganadero*, speaking *sotto voce*, "I wish to ship the gold as soon as possible, and as secretly too. You understand me, Captain Lautanas?"

"*Si, señor*."

"I shall have it brought aboard at night in a boat which belongs to me. It will be safer in your cabin than anywhere else, since no one need be the wiser about its place of deposit."

"No one shall know from me."

"That I am sure of, Captain Lautanas, for Tomas Silvestre is your indorser, and would be willing to be your bondsman, if that were required. It is not."

Again the captain of the *Condor* bows acknowledgement of the confidence reposed in him; and after a word or two of further arrangement the two separate.

Don Gregorio taking seat in the shore boat is rowed back to the town, while the Chilean captain returns to his quarter-deck, and cigarritos.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LOOKING OVER THE OCEAN.

ABOUT the time Don Gregorio Montijo parts from the ship, the two *tukars*, De Lara and Calderon, are riding away from his house.

After leaving it, as already known, instead of returning to the town they face westward toward Dolores.

A cross-cut conducts them into the old road between Yerba Buena and the Mission; and once on this they ride along it at a rapid pace—a gallop.

The dust kicked up by the heels of their horses has scarce settled down, when another cavalcade is seen moving along the same road, also in the direction of Dolores.

This second party—in all four—is going at a gentler gait. For there are ladies in it, two of them—the other two being gentlemen.

As the horses are the same late standing saddled in Don Gregorio's courtyard, afterward seen outside, it may be surmised who are the riders.

Dona Carmen is carrying out the promise made by her father: giving their sailor guests a *paseo de caballo*.

As no exploration of the country around San Francisco is complete without a visit to the old Mission Dolores, to the Mission she is taking them. Though the programme of their equestrian excursion is to extend beyond—to the summit of a hill overlooking the outside ocean.

The two señoritas take delight in the saddle. But either would take a five-barred gate or a "bullfinch" with any of the hunting *Dianas* of England; and if they have not ridden to hounds they have chased wild horses, on others scarce less wild.

Those on which they are now mounted seem but half-tamed. Fresh from the stable, they rear and pitch, at times standing on end. For all this their riders have no fear of being unhorsed. They only smile and strike with their little *cuartos* all the sharper.

Strange, picturesque and beautiful these two Californian equestriennes—strange from their mode of mount, as already said, *a la Duchesse de Berry*; as also the half-male attire; picturesque in this, with their hats of Vicuña wool, their Calzoncillos lace-fringed over their feet, their buff boots and large roweled spurs; beautiful as the south sea wind floats back the brims of their sombreros, and tosses their clustering hair to dishevelment, while the excitement of their ride brings out the bloom on their cheeks, and the sparkle in their Spanish eyes.

The cavaliers who accompany regard them with glances of ardent admiration.

If they had been but smitten before, they are getting fast fixed now; and both will soon be seriously in love. The *paseo de caballo* promises to end in a proposal for journeying through life together—in twos.

On starting out the young officers may have been troubled with a thought of their own costume not being shipshape. On horseback in a naval uniform!

No fear of ridicule, however, on the roads of California, where all ride, gentle or simple—sailors in Guernsey shirts and pilot jackets—soldiers with straw hats, barefooted in the stirrups!

Crozier is not thinking of the thing, nor has he any need. His rank has furnished him with a frock coat, which, close-buttoned and fitting well, gives a handsome contour to his person. Besides, he is a splendid rider, has followed hounds before he ever set foot on board ship.

Carmen Montijo can perceive this; can tell with half a glance that her cavalier is an accomplished horseman. It pleases her to know it; gives her pride to think that her *amanti* is a man equal to everything.

With the other two things are a little different. Willie Cadwallader is no rider, having had but little practice. Up to that hour he has not been in the saddle two-score times. This is obvious to all—Inez, as the rest. Besides the mid is in a pea-jacket, which, although becoming aboard ship, does seem a little odd in the saddle, on a prancing California mustang.

Does it make Willie look gay? Not in his own eyes. He does not give a thought to it, nor feel the slightest sense of humiliation at his inferiority in horsemanship. He but laughs when his mustang curvets, the louder when it comes near pitching him.

Nor does it make him ridiculous in the eyes of Inez Alvarez. On the contrary, she appears charmed and laughs too; delighted at his *naïveté* and the manliness he displays in not caring for consequences. She knows he is not in his own element, the sea. She believes that there he would be brave, heroic, among ropes the most skilled of reefers, and that if he cannot gracefully sit a horse he could ride big billows, breasting them like an albatross.

Thus mutually taking each other's measure, the four equestrians canter on, and soon arrive at the Mission.

They only pause to give a glance at the old monastery, where Spanish monks long lorded it over their red-skinned neophytes; at the church where erst ascended incense, and prayers were pattered in the ears of the aboriginal, by him ill understood.

A moment spent in the *cemeterio*, where Carmen points out the tomb inclosing the remains of her mother, and drops a tear upon the grave. A second is forced from her by the reflection that soon she will be far from that sacred spot, perhaps never more to stand upon it!

Away from it now, and on to the hill, from which they may behold the Pacific!

In another hour they are upon it, and see the mighty ocean extending before them to the far horizon verge, the limit of their vision. All bright, beautiful and blue. Only some dark specks in the dim distance, the lone isles of the Farrallones more northerly, and not so far off, the "Seal Rock" and that called *de campana*, from its hollow arcade resembling the belfry of a church. Nearer, a long line of breakers, foam-crested, and nearer still a strip of shiny beach, backed by a broad reach of sand-dunes—*medanos*.

Seated in the saddle, they contemplate the superb panorama. The four are not together, but apart—two and two. Somehow or other, their horses have thus disposed themselves. The one ridden by Crozier having drawn up alongside that of Carmen; while the mustang so much mismanaged by Cadwallader has elected to range itself beside that of Inez.

Perhaps the pairing has not been altogether accidental. Whether or no, it is done; and the conversation, up to that time general, is now reduced to the simplicity of the dialogue.

We must take the two pairs apart, giving priority to those who by years have the right to it.

Crozier, looking abroad over the ocean, says:

"I shall soon be upon it."

He says it with a sigh.

"And I too," responds Carmen, in a tone singularly similar.

"Senorita, how soon do you think of leaving California?"

"Very soon; my father is already making arrangements and expects to get away in a week, or less. Indeed, this very day he has gone down to the harbor to see about a ship that will take us as far as Panama. After inviting you he was compelled to go, and commissioned me to apologize for the rudeness of his not being at home to receive you. He will be there by the time we get back."

"For that no apology is needed. I suppose you are very happy at the prospect of returning to Spain?"

"No, indeed, although it is my native land. On the contrary, it is a prospect that makes me rather miserable. I like California, and could live here forever. Don't you?"

"I do now. In two weeks from this time I should care no more for it."

"Why do you say that, Don Eduardo? There is an enigma in your words. Will you please explain them?"

While asking these questions her gray-blue eyes look into his with an expression of searching eagerness, almost anxiety.

"Shall I tell you why, senorita?"

"I have asked you, senor."

"The answer is, I like California now because it contains what is to me the dearest object on earth—the woman I love. In two weeks I shall not care for the country, because she will be no longer in it. That, senorita, is the key to what you have called an enigma."

"Will you pardon a woman's curiosity, and tell me the name of the lady who can thus control your likes and dislikes of our dear California?"

Crozier hesitates, a red spot flashing out upon his cheek. He is going to pronounce the most important speech of his life. What if it should be coldly received? But no, he can not be mistaken. That question—asked so quaintly, yet so feelingly—surely it has courted the answer. He gives the name:

"Dona Carmen Montijo."

"Eduardo, are you in earnest? Can I take your words for true? Do not deceive me—in mercy do not. For if you do I am lost—lost. To you—and I now tell you—I have surrendered my heart, my soul. Say that I have yours! oh, say it!"

"I have said it, Carmen."

"Sincerely?"

"Look in my eyes for the answer."

She obeys; and the two bending nearer, seated in their saddles, for a time gaze into each other's eyes;

the flashes from the blue crossing and commingling with the flashes from the brown.

Neither can mistake the meaning of those mutual glances. In both it is the light of love, pure as it is passionate.

Not another word passes between them. The dreaded crisis is over; and their hearts quivering with sweet content, they now turn their thoughts to the future, full of happy promise.

Near by are two other hearts, quite as happy as theirs, at the close of a scene less sentimental, and a conversation that, to one overhearing it, might appear only in jest. For all that, it was in real earnest, and so ended.

Following is the final speech of Cadwallader, and the reply of his sweetheart:

"Inez, you're the dearest girl I ever met in all my cruises. Now don't let us beat about any longer, but take in sail and bring the ship to an anchor. Will you be mine, and marry me?"

"I will."

No need to stay longer there, no object for continuing to gaze over the ocean.

Their horses seem instinctively to understand this; and turning all together, set heads for home.

CHAPTER XIX.

A GOLPE DE CABALLO.

AN hour later on the same day.

The sun low down, almost touching the crest of the coast range hills.

Two horsemen moving along the Dolores road, their faces set for San Francisco.

It is De Lara and Calderon returning from the *pelea de gallos*.

They have seen Don Manuel Losada, and arranged everything about the duel. Faustino has finally determined to fight. Instigated by his more courageous confederate, and with the promise of strong backing by Losada—a sort of California bravo—his own courage is at length screwed to the sticking-point. It is kept there by *Catalan* brandy—they had found freely circulating around the cock-pit. A flask of it they have brought away with them, at intervals taking a pull, as they ride along the road.

Under the influence of this potent spirit Don Faustino has become quite valiant, and swears if he can once again set eyes on the *guardia marina* he will not leave him without giving an insult, gross enough to extract a challenge. *Carambo!* he will do as De Lara has recommended: cuff him, kick him, spit in his face; anything to make the *gringo* fight—that boy without a beard. And if he don't, then, *carambo!* he shall apologize; get down upon his knees, acknowledge him, Faustino Calderon, the better man; and surrender all claims to the smiles of Inez Alvarez.

With this swaggering talk he entertains his gambling confederate, as the two are returning to the town.

De Lara, less noisy, is nevertheless excited. The *Catalan* brandy has also affected him—not to increase his courage, for of this he has enough already; but to remove the sullenness which, after the scene at Don Gregorio's house, had taken possession of his spirit. Six hours have since elapsed; for the first three brooding over his humiliation—what he is pleased to call his wrongs, the alcohol has set him up again, while he is still further rehabilitated by the prospect of speedy vengeance. He bases his hope of this on the knowledge of his skill as a swordsman. Although also a good shot, he prefers the sword for his weapon. And he congratulates himself that he is to have the choice; for, his antagonist having first demanded the card, must needs be the challenger.

This is a point that still troubles Don Faustino. As things stand he must challenge his intended adversary, giving the latter the advantage. The Spanish Californian, ready enough with steel, has a fear of firearms, and never fights with pistols unless forced.

Calderon keeps alluding to this as they ride on, notwithstanding that his comrade has pointed out how this difficulty is to be got over, and continues reminding him.

While thus engaged discussing the pros and cons of the forthcoming duello, there appears that which promises to simplify the affair, as far as concerns the thought troubling Calderon.

Before their eyes at some distance along the road, a cloud of dust is ascending. In its midst can be distinguished the forms of horses—four of them—with riders on their backs.

Plying the spur, and galloping nearer, the gamblers make out that they are proceeding in the same direction as themselves—toward the town, or, at all events, for some point on the shore of the bay.

They do not need to waste time in conjecture. They are near enough to arrive at a certain conclusion, assisted by what they already know. It is remembered by them that a certain party has that day gone out for a *paseo de campo*. The figures comprising the cavalcade are four, and therefore correspond in number to the excursionists. In all probability it is they.

"Ho!" cries De Lara, at length becoming sure of it. "See, Faustino, you have the chance you've been wanting—you see it has come without your seeking it. A good omen. There's your *guardia marina*—your rival—with your sweetheart, too, riding by his side. Now you can insult him to your heart's content. Come on, *camarado!* I intend giving a fresh affront to mine."

Saying this, he plies the spur and forces his horse onward.

Calderon does likewise.

Soon they are close up to the party returning from their pleasant *paseo*. These are riding two and two, for the road is narrow, not permitting all abreast.

Crozier and Carmen are in the advance, Cadwallader and Inez a hundred yards behind.

De Lara passes the latter without saying a word, leaving them to Calderon, who soon after comes up.

But now that he is up he does not know what to do. The clattering of hoofs behind has given warning to Cadwallader, whose instinct tells him of intended outrage. He is made aware of it first, being nearest, and first prepares to repel it.

Suddenly wrenching his horse around, he draws his dirk—again that diabolical dirk—and holds it bare before the eyes of Calderon, coming up. Now not in sport, for the pricking of the Californian's

horse, but in stern earnest to prick the rider himself if he do aught to provoke it.

This resolve can be read in the young officer's attitude, in his eyes, in the set of his features. There no longer the laugh of reckless boyhood, but the resolute determination of the man.

Badly as he sits his horse, it will not do to dash against him, as Calderon intended. The collision will cost life, and likely that of the aggressor.

Seeing this, the Californian suddenly reins up. Then swerving aside, goes on without giving the insult, either in act or speech. Despite the drink, his courage has deserted him. He is but too glad to get out of the scrape.

Somewhat crestfallen, like a knight compelled to lower his plume, he rides on after De Lara.

He gets up in time to be the witness of a scene somewhat similar in its commencement but of very different termination.

Crozier too, hearing hoofs behind, turns his horse and looks back.

He sees De Lara tearing toward him, and at a glance divines the intent. It is a *golpe de caballo*—a common mode of insult among Spanish Californians.

Instead of awaiting the collision, or turning aside to avoid it, he determines on a different course. He is upon a strong horse, and confident he can stay there.

With this confidence he faces toward the advancing enemy, and spurs straight at him.

Breast to breast they meet, and shoulder to shoulder they go crashing together. The men are both silent themselves; only a cry from Carmen, a shriek from Inez, simultaneous with the shock.

Then it is over. De Lara is seen rolling upon the road, his horse floundering in the dust beside him!

Instantly regaining his feet, he rushes to get hold of his pistols, still in the saddle holsters.

He is too late. Cadwallader has come up, and dropping from his mustang, as if from a poop deck, has made himself master of the weapons.

Disarmed, his glittering attire all over dust, discomfited, De Lara stands in the middle of the road. He can do nothing now only storm and threaten, interlarding his threats with vile epithets and the emphasis of oaths.

The ladies, at Crozier's request, have ridden on ahead, and their ears are not offended.

After listening a short while to the exhibition of his impotent spleen—Cadwallader laughing at it—Crozier calls out:

"Now, Don Francisco de Lara—for your card tells me that is your name—take a sailor's advice: go quietly to your quarters, and then stow yourself out of sight till your temper cools down. We don't want you to walk; you shall have your horse, though not your shooting-irons. These I shall take care of myself, and may return them to you when next we meet."

After dictating these humiliating conditions, which, *volens volens*, the defeated bravo is obliged to accept, the young officers turn their horses' heads to the road, and coolly canter away.

Having joined the *senoritas*, they continue their interrupted ride, with no fear of again being disturbed by *golpe de caballo*.

CHAPTER XX.

HASTA CADIZ.

THE sun has set over the far extending waters of the Pacific, and San Francisco Bay is illuminated by the light of the moon.

On its breast is perfect calm, the ships showing as in a mirror with masts reversed, every rope of their rigging having its duplicate underneath.

No canvas is spread, and the flags left flying for the night do not fly, but hang drooping down from the tops of masts, or over taffrails.

Among the vessels both in harbor and offing reigns tranquillity, almost complete stillness. Strange, too, for usually these send some sounds ashore, if only the rattling of a chain, the chant of the night-watch at the windlass, drawing the anchor's hawser ataut, or the song of the tars squatted around the hatch of the fore-castle.

No such sounds proceed from the ships in San Francisco Bay. For there are but few men aboard to make them.

Now and then a boat puts off from the side of one better manned, or is seen returning from the town, its slow, laborious movement and unsteady stroke of the oars telling that it has not the full complement of a crew.

In the town all is different. There, noise, crowded streets, flashing lights, and the confusion of voices. Shops may be shut, but houses are open; restaurants, drinking bars, saloons devoted to gambling, with others to debauchery of a more questionable kind.

Into all of them go men loaded with gold-dust, or dollars; often coming out lighter than they entered in purse—in heart heavier.

Into this Pandemonium two young men are about to enter. They are advancing toward it along the shore road, which leads into San Francisco from the south.

It is at that hour when all sorts of iniquity have commenced their nightly career. Though in San Francisco some kinds do not wait for the night, many of the gambling saloons being open throughout the day.

The young men in question are Edward Crozier and William Cadwallader. After returning from the *paseo de campo*, they have dined with Don Gregorio Montijo, and made their adieus to him and his family, with no intention of calling upon or expectation of seeing them again until they meet at Cadiz.

There they hope to renew the acquaintance, are in fact as sure of it as men under the circumstances may be. Their ship is ordered to the Mediterranean station, and will call at the Spanish port on her way. She has first to show herself at the Sandwich Isles, and returning across the Pacific, look in at Mazatlan and other Mexican ports. Don Gregorio Montijo has been made acquainted with this programme and much more. He knows what has passed between the two *guardia marinas* and his girls. All four have confessed that they are *fiancées*; and the Spanish *hidalgo* has sanctioned the engagements. Not without inquiring into the character and social standing of his future *cunados*. He has been aboard the warship, and obtained from Captain Bracebridge satis-

faction on these points—sufficient to make him quite contented with the alliance. Both the young men are of good family; Cadwallader passing rich, Crozier in prospect a millionaire.

The Spaniard on his side has imparted confidences, in short given his programme for the coming months. He has told them of his reasons for leaving California, of his good fortune in disposal of his property, with the handsome sum obtained. Also that he has that day secured passage in a sailing vessel as far as Panama. He has given them some details about the sort of ship selected, and why he has chosen her. After stating the chief, he adds: the *ninas* will be better voyaging that way. They will be more comfortable, having the whole ship to themselves. Besides, they will not be exposed to the company that quiet people would rather shun—rough gold-diggers, crowds of whom are now returning to Europe and the United States, *via* Panama.

All these confidences Don Gregorio has imparted in the after-dinner conversation, as he and his guests are sipping their wine.

One piece of intelligence he has communicated in regard to the engaged ship, which does not much surprise his listeners—that she is entirely without a crew, not so much as a single sailor being aboard of her. He asks their opinion as to how the difficulty may be got over. As naval men he supposes they should know.

They do not know—at least not enough to remedy a defect of such magnitude. Even their own captain, with all his official authority, could not under the circumstances find hands for other ship than his own.

Crozier, however, can promise Don Gregorio some little help in his dilemma. He knows one sailor who has just left the *Crusader*, his time of service having expired since the ship came into port. A splendid seaman, who can be trusted in every way. Harry Blew, for this is the sailor's name, may not yet have gone off to the gold-diggings; and the young officer thinks he has not. He would not leave without bidding a more formal adieu to the man who lately saved his life. For Crozier has done this. In all likelihood Harry is still in San Francisco. The officers are going into the town and will search for him that very night. If found, Crozier can give Don Gregorio assurance that at least one seaman, and a good one, will offer his services to the captain of the crewless ship. If not, he, Crozier will cease to believe in the gratitude and boasted fidelity of a sailor.

This promise has been the parting speech made to Don Gregorio by his guests. Though not the last spoken by them before leaving. With the two other, and only members of the family, adieus of a different, and far more tender, nature have closed their interview *humbly* *adiz*.

In the *patio* where the parting has taken place—outside under the soft, silvery light of a California moon—the *gages d'amour* have been again displayed, and fresh vows exchanged—this time sealed with kisses.

Their lips still aglow with these, their hearts thrilling with sweet triumph, the young officers continue on toward the town.

They are afoot, having refused Don Gregorio's offer to furnish them with horses. In high spirits they prefer walking.

Between the two for some time there is silence. Each is occupied with his own reflections, whose sacredness absorbs him.

And for awhile from these there is nothing to distract them. The moonbeams falling brightly across their path, the ripple of the waves breaking lightly along the strand; above, the "chuck-will's-widow" sounding its soft monotone; all in consonance with their thoughts, a little sad after the parting.

As they draw nearer to the city, see the flashing of lights, and hear the hum of voices, other thoughts come uppermost, and they enter into conversation.

Crozier commences it.

"Well, old fellow, we've made a day of it. Haven't we?"

"That we have—a rousing jolly day. I don't think I ever enjoyed one more in my life."

"Only for the drawback."

"You mean those fellows? Why, that was the best part of it—so far as fun. To see the one in the sky-blue wrap, after I'd diked his horse, go off like a ship in a gale, with no man at the helm! By Jove! 'twas equal to Billy Button in the circus! And then the other whom you bowled over in the road, as he got up looking like a dog just come out of a dust-bin! Oh! it was delicious! The best shore adventure I've had since joining the *Crusader*. We'll have something to talk about when we get aboard."

"Yes; and something to do as well. We haven't seen the end of it yet."

"Why not? Surely you don't intend challenging that fellow?"

"I did in the morning. Had fully made up my mind to do it. Now, I'm not so sure that I shall."

"I'd do nothing of the kind, Ned. They're a bad lot, blackguards both, as their behavior has shown. They don't deserve to be treated as gentlemen."

"But we're in California, Will; where the code of the duel takes in such. Here even blackguards stand upon their punctilios of honor, as they call it. I've been told of a duel not long since between two professional gamblers, in which one of them was shot dead in his tracks. And only the other day a judge was called out by a fellow he'd tried for some misdemeanor, and not only actually went, but killed his man—the same which stood before him a criminal! It seems very absurd; but it is; and if this cavalier insists upon it, I shall have to turn out with him; no two ways about it."

"Still you're not called upon to challenge him."

"Not now. After the first interview with him I was. Then his insolence was left unpunished. Our second encounter has put a different face on the affair. In that he got more than he gave, and I think I may rest satisfied."

"You'd be hard to satisfy if you're not. I'm sure you've had your *revanche*, in good measure."

"At all events it now lies with him. On reflection, seeing the way the fellows have acted, they must be base coin—as you say—blackguards. The red one appears to be a sort of bravo, and, if we hadn't secured his pistols, I suppose he would have done some shooting. We'll see whether he comes to reclaim them. If he don't, I shall have to send them

to him. Otherwise he may have us up before one of those fighting justices for robbing him."

"Ha! ha! ha! That would be a rare joke—an appropriate ending to our day's adventure."

"On the contrary. A more appropriate one would be just now a good big drink. We've had war and women enough for one day; so let's on to the Parker House, and indulge in the other W, a whisky-punch, or a bumper of champagne. Whether it's Don Gregorio's heavy Spanish wines, or the leave-taking, I can't tell. But one or other's got my heart down, and it'll take some sort of strong tippie to get it up again."

"I'm with you for a 'time,' and a big spree into the bargain, if you pilot the way."

"Come on, then. But first, let us look up Harry Blew. Duty before deviltry. I promised Don Gregorio I would see him to-night."

"You know where to find him?"

"Oh! yes; Harry has made me acquainted with his address. Some sort of a cheap hostelry called the 'Sailor's Home,' down by the water's edge. He may not be at home, for all that. Still, we can leave a message for him. *Allons!* or, as it should be after speaking Spanish all day, *¡buenos!*"

Thus closing their dialogue, they continue on at increased speed, and are soon exploring the streets of San Francisco in search of the Sailor's Home.

CHAPTER XXI.

A TAR OF THE OLD TYPE.

HARRY BLEW is a tar of the true man-o'-war type. This of the olden time, when sailors were sailors, and ships were of oak, not iron.

Than he, a finer specimen of the foremastman never reefed top-sail, or took his tot of grog according to allowance.

Of a dark complexion naturally, exposure to sun, sea, and tar has deepened the tint till his visage shows almost copper-color; lighter along the cheeks, especially on Sundays, when these have had their hebdomadal shave.

His face is round, with features fairly regular; of the cheerful kind, their cheerfulness expressed in the sparkle of bright gray eyes, and a double row of sound white teeth, often smilingly exposed. A thick shock of brown hair, with a well-greased ringlet over each eye, supports a round-rimmed hat, blue-ribboned, and set well aft on the head.

Below, there is a broad, brawny chest, from which an amplitude of shirt collar falls back full seven inches over square shoulders, denoting strength, herculean. Erect he would stand six feet, but in this attitude he is seldom seen. More often stooped slightly forward, as if swarming up shrouds, or bent over a top-sail yard in the act of reefing. His arms are long and sinewy; while the duck trousers, fitting tight over his hips, display a pair of limbs tough as gristle, every inch of them.

Harry Blew is forty-five years of age; more than half of which he has spent on board a man-of-war; the last five in the *Crusader*. His period of service has expired just after entering the port of San Francisco; and although welcome to continue it into another term, he is also free to take his name off the ship's books, and go cruising on his own account.

In San Francisco, 1849, who would hesitate as to which course? Even a quarter-deck officer would prefer the latter; and for a foremastman it does not need a moment's consideration. Of course Harry Blew has claimed his discharge, and got it, with a certificate of honorable service, and such pay as was remaining due to him.

With these in his pocket, he has bid farewell to the ship, taken leave of his old shipmates, as also the man-of-war life, and is now at large in the streets of San Francisco.

His intention is to turn gold-digger. But not till he has got rid of the gold received from the ship's purser. When this is all gone he will start for the *placers* of the Sacramento.

The first part of the programme is carried out in an incredibly short time. Harry has not been six days ashore, when, plunging his hands into his pockets, he finds them empty. Not a coin left.

The same with his sea-chest, and every other receptacle where he is accustomed to stow his cash. His three months' pay has all been deposited on the counters of drinking-bars, and swept ruthlessly into their tills; most of it spent in treating his old shipmates, when he has a chance of seeing them ashore, as also other sailors at large like himself.

Impecuniosity is unpleasant anywhere and at any time. But in San Francisco, in the year 1849, it is a positive and serious predicament—almost a danger. Five dollars for a breakfast, ten for a dinner, and as much for a bed, even when spread under the thin shelter of canvas. It is a grace to get the lee side of a wooden-walled stable; but costs more money to sleep in a stable, with straw for the sheets, and the heat of the horses in lieu of blanket and coverlet.

In the necessity of seeking such indifferent accommodation Harry Blew finds himself six days after his discharge from the ship *Crusader*.

He now bethinks him it is almost time for carrying out the second part of his programme—going on to the gold *placers*, on the famed Feather river.

But how to get there? This is a question he has not before asked himself, and which he finds not so easily answered. It costs fifty dollars by steamer, and still more by stage. He has not any cash, and his sea-kit sold will not realize a fund sufficient to pay his passage up the Sacramento.

The discharged tar is in a dilemma—one with two horns. He can not go to the gold-digging, nor yet can he stay in San Francisco. He is living in a hostelry yelet the "Sailor's Home." One of the humblest and cheapest kind. Still dear enough to demand ten dollars a day for board and bed; the former spare enough, the latter so thick that three separate sailors are nightly called upon to share it; along with some live stock not calling for more particular description.

This is bad enough for Harry Blew, even though he be only a foremastman.

But still more threatens him. Despite its name, the owner of the "Home" has no hospitality in his heart. He has discovered that his guest is impecunious. This by three days' board and bed remaining unpaid for.

There is a notice conspicuously posted above the bar that "scores must be settled daily." And the discharged man-o'-war's man having disregarded this, has received notice of another kind, to the effect

that he is to appear no more at the hotel table, and also surrender up his third share of the bed.

At this Harry Blew is not angry, nor does he feel in any way affronted. He has the sense common to sailors, as to most others who tread in strange lands; and knows that when cash is not forthcoming, credit can not be expected. In San Francisco, as in other seaports, it is the universal and rigorous custom to which he must resign himself.

He is only sorry at having spent his cash so freely; a little repentant at having done it so foolishly; and a good deal downhearted.

But there is a silver lining to the cloud. The *Crusader* is still in port, and not expected to sail for another day or two. He may once more place his name upon the ship's books and rejoin her.

A word spoken to the first boat that comes ashore, and all will be well. He hesitates and reflects. Humiliating the thought of going back to the ship, after taking leave of everybody aboard. Returning to a dingy fore-castle and hauling tarry ropes, after the bright dreams he has recently been indulging in! To forego the gathering of gold-dust and nuggets, exchanging these for doubloons—or dollars—in short, to turn his back upon smiling fortune—perhaps a plenitude of riches, with resulting ease and idleness—and once more face the stormy sea, with hard knocks and hard work in store for him, all the rest of his life!

While the coin was yet clinking in his pockets, this was the dark side of the picture; that toward Sacramento the bright one. Now that they are empty every thing is changed. The cloud has veered round for Sacramento, the silver lining lies on the side of the ship.

The sailor ponders and reflects; as he does so, thrusting his hands into his pockets as if in search of coin. It is an act merely mechanical—for he knows he has not a cent.

While thus occupied he is seated in the little sanded bar-room of the "Home." Alone with the barkeeper—the latter eying his sailor guest with anything but a sympathetic look. For the book is before him, showing the indebtedness for three days' board and as many nights' bed; a record that makes a bar sinister between them.

Harry Blew thinks, and thinks. Must he surrender? Give up the dreams of getting bright gold and return to spreading black tar?

A glance at the barkeeper decides him. His decision is expressed in characteristic soliloquy:

"Wi' me the old sayin' 'I'll have to stan' good. 'Once a sailor still a sailor.' Damme! I'll go back to the *Crusader*."

CHAPTER XXII.

UNEXPECTED VISITORS.

HAVING resolved upon returning to his ship, Harry Blew is about to sally forth into the street, when his egress is unexpectedly prevented.

Not by the landlord of the low hostelry, nor yet the barkeeper. Both would be only too glad to get rid of a guest who is three days' reckoning in arrear. For his sea-chest, including a suit of Sunday-ashores, is good collateral security for the debt. It is already hypotheated for this, as its owner has been notified.

What hinders Harry Blew from going out is a man who is himself coming in.

No enemy, but a friend; for in the individual who has thus darkened the door, and thrown his shadow across the sanded floor, the discharged tar recognizes an officer of his own ship. Indeed, two, since there is a second close-followed by the first. At sight of them, Harry Blew utters an exclamation of joy. Not noisily, but in a subdued tone. At the same time jerking off his straw hat, giving a pluck at one of his front ringlets, and bobbing his head; all this simultaneous with a backward scrape of his foot upon the sanded floor. It is intended in humble salutation, for he receives his officers with the same respect as if he had encountered them upon the quarter-deck of their ship.

To one, the elder, he makes a second obeisance beyond the rigorous call either of duty or discipline. For in him he recognizes one who has done a great service to himself, in short, saved his life. When the sailor, struck by a boom, was hurled overboard, into a high, rolling sea, and senseless would have sunk to the bottom, a strong swimmer leapt after, caught, and kept him on the surface till a boat rescued both.

It was Edward Crozier who did this, and it is he who has entered the tavern.

The bar-room is but dimly lighted, and as he steps across its threshold, he asks:

"Is there a sailor staying here, by name Harry Blew?"

"Ay, ay, sir," is the prompt response, Harry himself giving it, along with the salutation described.

During the short interval of silence that succeeds, the sailor's heart can almost be heard beating. Late depressed—down in the dumps, as he himself would have worded it, the appearance of his preserver is like saving him a second time. Mr. Crozier has come to invite him back to rejoin the ship; the very thing he was thinking of. This is his surmise.

"I'm glad to find you here, Harry. I was afraid you had gone off to the diggings. How is it you haven't?"

"Well, Master Edward, I did intend standin' on that tack, but couldn't get under way, for the want of a wind."

"I don't understand you, Harry."

"Why, you see, sir, I've been a little bit speerish since comin' ashore, and my locker's got low. More'n that, it's quite cleaned out. Though, I suppose there's plenty of gold in the diggin's, it takes gold to get there; and as I haven't any, I'm laid up here like an old hulk upon a mud-bank. That's just how it is, young gentlemen."

"In that case perhaps you wouldn't feel indisposed to ship again?"

"I'd already 'most made up my mind to it, sir. I war just about startin' to go aboard the *Crusader*, and askin' your honor to get me entered on the ship's books again. I'm willin' to join for a fresh term, if they'll take me."

"They'd take and be glad to get you. No doubt about that. Such a seaman as you, Harry, need never be without a ship. But I don't want you to join the *Crusader*."

"How is that, sir?"

"Because I think I can help you to something bet-

ter; at least it will be something more to your advantage in a pecuniary sense. You wouldn't mind serving in a merchant ship with wages three or four times as much as you can get on a man-of-war? How would you like it, Harry?"

"I'd like it amazingly, sir. And for the matter o' its bein' a merchanter, that's neither here nor there, so long's you recommend it. I'll go cook if you tell me to."

"No, no," laughingly replies the officer, "that would never do. I should pity those who'd have to eat the dishes you'd dress for them. Besides, I should be sorry to see you stewing your strength away in front of a galley fire. I'm authorized to offer you a better berth. It's on a Chilean vessel, and her captain is either Chilean or Spanish. That won't make any difference to you."

"No, sir. I don't care what the ship be, or the skipper either, so long as there's good wages and plenty o' grub."

"And plenty of grog, too, Harry?"

"Ay, ay, sir; I confess to a weakness for that, leastways three times a day."

"No doubt you'll get it as often as you've a mind. But, Harry, I have a word to say about that very thing. Besides my interest in your own welfare, I've another and more selfish interest in the Chilean ship; so has Mr. Cadwallader. We both want you to be on your best behavior during the trip you're to take. On board will be two lady passengers as far as Panama. You're to do every thing in your power to make things comfortable for them; and if they should ever be in any danger, from storm, shipwreck, or otherwise, you'll stand by them?"

"Yes, Harry," adds Cadwallader, "you'll do that, won't you?"

"Lor, your honors!" replies the sailor, in some surprise. "Sure ye needn't put that questyan to me—a man-o'-war's man! I'd do that much anyhow, out o' starn sense o' duty; but when it comes to takin' care o' a kuppel o' ladies, to say nothin' o' both bein' young and beautiful—"

"Hilloa, Harry! How do you know they're either one or the other?" asks Crozier, in surprise, Cadwallader repeating the question.

"Lord love ye, young gentlemen! do you think a common sailor hain't got eyes in his head for any thing but ropes an' tar? You forget I war o' the boat's crew as rowed two sweet creatur's aboard the Crusader the night o' the grand dancin', and arterward took the same ashore along wi' two young reefers as went to see 'em home. Sure, Harry Blew bein' cox on that occasion couldn't help hearing some o' the speeches as passed in the starn-sheets, though they war spoke in the ears o' the saynoritas, soft as the breeze that fanned their fair white brows, an' brought the color out in their smooth cheeks."

"Hail you poetical rascal, you've been eavesdroppin', have you? I forgot that you talk Spanish."

"Only a little, your honor; just enough to do me a service aboard the ship you speak o'."

"Well, I won't scold you, seeing that you couldn't help it. I'll confess the ladies in that boat are the same who are to be passengers in the ship. Now, you'll take care of them, I know."

"That you may depend on, Master Edward. The one as touches a hair o' their heads 'll first have to tear the whole o' his off the head o' Harry Blew. I'll see them safe to Panama, or else never get there myself. I promise it on the word o' a man-o'-war's man."

"That's enough. Now, to give you directions about joining the ship. She's called the 'Condor,' and is somewhere about in the harbor. You'll find her easily enough. However, you needn't go in search of her now; but report yourself to a gentleman, whose name and address is upon this card, a ship-agent, I suppose. He will engage you, make out your papers, and give you full instructions. It appears the Condor is short of hands, even without a mate; and it's quite possible you may receive that berth, if you go soon enough. It's too late to-night, but by presenting yourself early in the morning, you'll stand a good chance of getting shipped as mate—all the better from your being able to talk a little Spanish."

"Thank ye, sir; I'll show my figure-head to the agent first thing in the morning. Not much chance o' any one bein' there before me."

"All right, Harry. And as the Crusader is to sail soon—perhaps in a couple of days—we may not see you again. Remember what you've said about the saynoritas. We shall both trust to your fidelity; we know we can."

"Ay! that you can, young gentlemen. Trust your lives to it, an' those of them as is dear to you."

"All right! Let's hope we'll meet again. When you get back to New York you know where to find me. Now, to say good-by. Give us a gripe of your hand, old boy. God bless you!"

The young men, each in turn, take the horny hand of the sailor, and press it in earnest friendship.

The pressure is returned; that of Crozier by a squeeze that speaks of more than mere respect. It, and the look accompanying, tell of true gratitude, fondness bordering on devotion.

After the affectionate interchange, the two mids take their departure, and continue their cruise through the streets.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN INHOSPITABLE "HOME."

HARRY BLEW stands in the doorway of the Sailor's Home, watching the young officers as they walk away, and thinking of the change in his prospects, brought about by their interview.

Certainly these have brightened within the hour; for, no longer elevated by the hope of getting to the gold-placers, they have been at their darkest and lowest.

Now the thought of double or treble pay, on board a snug ship, though it be but a trading-vessel, with the chance of becoming mate, instead of foremastman, has given a fillip to the sailor's spirits, and brought them up again.

The only damper is parting with the fine young fellow, his patron and preserver. But he has suffered this before when separating with the Crusader, and can better bear it now, under the reflection that though absent, he will still have an opportunity of proving his gratitude. He knows how much Crozier is interested in the well-being of Dona Carmen Montijo—as the younger mid in that of Inez Alvarez;

and to be intrusted with a sort of guardianship of the saynoritas is a proud thought to the sailor.

To carry out the confidence reposed in him will be a labor of love; and he vows in his heart it shall be carried out, if need be at the risk of his life.

Heaving a sigh as the midshipmen pass out of sight, he turns back into the bar-room, where he is confronted by that which brings the shadow back over his spirits. It is the barkeeper with the frowning face.

Just now there is something like a smile upon it; for the man has got it into his mind that the sailor guest is no longer impecunious. He must have received assistance from the officers, who no doubt came to engage him for their ship—perhaps an advance of bounty-money.

"Well, my salt," begins the barkeeper, in a tone intended to be soothing, "I guess you've got the shiners now, and can settle up your score."

"No, indeed, sir," answered Harry, more than ever taken aback; "I'm sorry to say I hain't."

"And what have them gold-buttoned fellows been talking to you about?"

"Not about money, master. Them's two young officers as belong to my ship. They was talkin' of somethin' else—altogether different."

"uch good they've done you, if they haven't given you something better than talk. Words won't pay your board-bill."

"I know that, sir. But I expect soon to get some money—maybe to-morrow mornin'."

"That's been your story for the last three days. It won't stand good any longer. You get no more tick here."

"Can't I have supper and bed for another night?"

"No, that you can't."

"I'll pay for them first thing in the mornin'."

"You'll pay for them this night—now—if you expect to get them. If you've no expectation, it's no use talking. What do you think we keep a tavern for? It would soon be to let, bodily, bar, beds, and all, if we'd only such customers as you. So the sooner you streak it, the better the landlord will like it. He's just given me orders to tell you so."

"It's gallows hard, mate; the more so, as I've got the promise of a good berth aboard a ship now in the harbor. The young officers you see'd have just been to tell me of it."

"Then why didn't they give you some money to clear your kit?"

"They'd have done that, no doubt, if I'd only thort o' askin' them. I forgot all about it."

"Ah! that's all very fine, but I don't believe a word of it. If they cared to have you on their ship, they'd have given you the wherewithal to get there. But come! it's no use palavering any longer. The landlord won't like it. He has given his orders; pay or no."

"Dash it! I must go."

"Be off, then! As I have said, the sooner the better."

After delivering this stern ultimatum, the barkeeper scowlingly retires behind his bar, to look more blandly on two guests who have presented themselves in front of it, called for drinks, and tossed down a dollar to pay for them.

The sailor turns toward the door, and without saying another word, steps out into the street.

Once there, he does not stop or stand hesitating. The hospitality of the Sailor's Home has proved a sorry sham; and stung by the shabby treatment received, he is only too glad to get away from the place. All his life used to quarters on a ship, with everything found for him, he has never experienced the pang of homelessness.

He feels it now, with all its misery—its humiliation—and imagines that the passers-by can see that he is humiliated.

Haunted by this unpleasant fancy, and urged on by it, he hurries away, nor stays his steps till out of sight of the Sailor's Home—quite out of the street in which the hostelry stands. He even hates the thought of going back for his chest, which he will have to do on the morrow.

Meanwhile, what is to become of him for the night? where is he to get supper and a bed?

About sleep he cares less, but having had no dinner, he is hungry, half-famished, and could eat a pound or two of the saltiest and toughest pork that ever came out of a ship's cask.

In this unhappy mood he strays on along the streets. There is no lack of food under his eyes—almost within reach of his hand. But only to tantalize and still further sharpen his appetite. Restaurants are open all around him; and under their blazing lamps he can see steaming dishes and joints set out upon the tables—guests around, with others going in.

He too might enter without any fear of being challenged as an intruder. For among the men inside are some in coarse garb, many not so decently appareled as he.

But what use presenting himself in a restaurant? He has not a cent in his pockets. Why go in to gaze at dishes he may not eat and dare not call for? He remembers his recent humiliation too keenly to risk having it repeated; and again saddened by the thought of it, he turns his back upon the tempting spread and tramps gloomily on.

Still the question comes again, where is he to get supper and sleep?

How is the problem to be solved?

What a pity he didn't think of telling the young gentlemen of his fix, and asking a little relief. Either of them would have given it at once, and without a word.

No use regretting his neglect, now that they are gone—in all likelihood back to the ship.

How nice it would be if himself aboard the Crusader—in her forecabin among his old shipmates! It cannot be, and therefore it is idle to think of it.

What on earth is he to do?

Ah! a thought strikes him. He thinks of the gentleman to whom Crozier has directed him to apply—the supposed ship-agent.

Though only a foremastman, Harry Blew is not altogether illiterate. The seaport town where he first saw the light had its common school, in which he has been taught to read and write. The former of these elementary branches, supplemented by a smattering of Spanish picked up in South American ports, as also at the Philippine Isles, enables him to decipher the writing upon the card which Crozier has left with him.

Holding it under the light of a lamp, he makes out the name, "Don Tomas Silvester," with the address appended.

Returning the bit of pasteboard to his pocket, buttoning up his dreadnaught jacket, and taking a fresh hitch at his duck trousers, he starts off on a street cruise in search of Don Tomas Silvester.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE "HELL" EL DORADO.

A MONTE bank in the city of San Francisco, in the restaurant known as "El Dorado"—third part eating-house, the other two-thirds devoted to drinking and gambling, in shares about equally proportioned.

The two last are carried on in the same apartment; a large oblong saloon, with a liquor bar along one end, extending from side to side, and backed by an array of bottles, glasses and decanters, in sparkle and variety of color far outstripping the proudest apothecary's shop.

Besides the space set apart for the votaries of Bacchus, there is plenty left for those who worship at the shrine of Fortuna. Her temple does not take up much room; being only a table with a row of chairs around it.

The properties pertaining to the adoration of the goddess, through the medium of *monte*, are neither varied nor cumbersome. They consist of a bit of green baize overspreading the table, with two playing-cards placed upon it, face upward, and held adhesively by having their backs gummed to the cloth. They are "court" cards, pictured Spanish fashion; one representing a knight on horseback; the other a man afoot, of aspect intended to be sinister. The former is our queen, by the Spaniards termed "Cavallo;" the other the knave, or "sota."

Other insignia on the table are a pack of cards complete, and several piles, cylindrically shaped, and variously colored, the pieces composing them of doubloon, or dollar size; only that instead of being gold, or silver, they are ivory. They are the cheques, or counters of the game.

Besides these there are on the *monte* table large sums of money, in various shapes—notes, coins, bags of gold-dust and nuggets. They lie in separate heaps around its edge, the largest alongside the pile of ivory cheques at the right hand of the banker, who is "dealer;" and in front of him who is at the same time teller and cashier—the "croupier."

Before the latter there is also an implement peculiar to a gaming-table in California. It is a set of scales with weights appertaining; their purpose to ascertain the value of the little sacks of dust seen lying around the table.

The dealer sits centrally in a high chair, the croupier at his elbow on the right; the players surrounding the table.

Of these last, there is a variety such as might not be met with in any other "hell" upon earth. Certainly it could not be in Homburg, Baden, or Monaco; for in the San Francisco "inferno" are men not only of every nationality, with costumes corresponding, but of every rank in the social scale; classes rarely seen in the same crowd.

The gentleman who may have won university honors; the officer wearing gold straps on his shoulder, or yellow lace around the brim of his cap; the native Californian, showily attired; the lawyer or doctor, in sober black—even the judge that morning seen upon the justice-seat—are all around the *monte* table of the "El Dorado," mingling with men in red flannel shirts and blanket-coats, trousers tucked into the tops of mud-bedaubed boots; with sailors in pea-jackets of coarse pilot, or smocks of Guernsey, unwashed, unkempt, unshorn, unshaven. Not only mingling with, but jostled by them rudely if occasion calls.

No distinction of rank, class, or profession here. All are equal in the El Dorado; for all have entered on the same errand—to get rich by gambling.

The gold shining upon the table is reflected in their faces. Not smiling or cheerful, but in the stern expression of greed; earnest and fixed, as if stamped into their features.

No sign of hilarity or joy; not a word of badinage passing about, or between. Scarce a syllable spoken around the table, except the call-words of the game, or an occasional remark by the croupier, as he pays the bets, or distributes cheques.

If there be no light humor, neither is there much ill-manners. Strangely assorted as is the motley crowd, in part composed of the roughest specimens of California humanity, noisy speech is exceptional, and rude behavior rare. Either shown would be repressed, and soon silenced. Though perhaps not till after noise of louder kind, the excited talk of a quarrel, quickly followed by the cracking of pistols; then a man borne off wounded, in all likelihood another dead; taken up from the sanded floor, and carried, feet foremost, out of the room.

In an instant it would all be over. The gamblers called away from their game would return to the table, the dealing of the cards continue; and amidst the clinking of coin and the clattering of cheques, the sanguinary encounter would cease to be thought of.

Pistols and bowie-knives are the police that keep order in the El Dorado—a pair of the former, Colt's revolver, size No. 2—rest upon the table close to the right elbow of the dealer, convenient to his hand. They are capped and loaded, every chamber in both having its ball.

No one takes any more notice of them than if they were a pair of snuffers on their tray. For he who keeps this strange menace by his side is evidently in earnest—from his looks one with whom it would not be safe to trifle.

He is a man of special type, though not special to California. His like may be met everywhere in the United States, more often in the Mississippi valley. New Orleans and St. Louis are his metropolitan centers; Louisville, Natchez, Memphis, Vicksburg, and Galveston, Texas, being places provincial, which he honors with an occasional visit. He is also encountered aboard the steamboats plying on the western waters—chiefly those that are large and called "crack." He leaves the lesser ones to the more obscure and timid practitioners of his calling.

Wherever seen he is resplendent in shirt-front, with diamond studs, and a cordon of rings on his fingers that fairly flash as he deals out the cards.

In short, the States "sportsman" is an elegant of

the first water, appareled and perfumed as a D'Orsay or Brummell, and although socially lower or less honored, having a sense of honor as high, perhaps higher than either. Like them, he has his *femme entretenue*; but keeps her—not she him.

And affronted, he will fight his duel, be himself the challenger!

This general description will apply in almost every particular to the *monte* dealer in the saloon El Dorado—who is a fair specimen of the "sport." In figure, well-formed; face, good-looking, with Spanish cast, cheeks clean shaven, the upper lip mustached, the lower one carrying an imperial that extends below the point of his chin. Perhaps the expression of his eyes is the only thing that can be caviled at; this giving a clew to thoughts anything but innocent, and often sinister.

Never more so than on this night. For it is that succeeding the day on which occurred the incidents described as having taken place at the house of Don Gregorio Montijo, and on the road to the Dolores Mission.

And the man who presides at the *monte* table, dealing out the cards, is Don Francisco De Lara.

CHAPTER XXV.

A MONTE BANK IN FULL BLAST.

It is nine o'clock, and the bank is in full blast.

Up to this time betters, in thin row around the table, staking only dollars, like skirmishers in advance of an army firing stray shots from guns of light caliber.

Now the heavy battalions have come on, the ranks filled up, two rows of betters, in places three, engaging in the game. And instead of silver dollars, gold eagles and doubloons—these the great guns—thung down upon the green baize, with a rattle continuous as the firing of musketry.

The battle of the night has begun.

Notwithstanding this general assault upon his citadel, and from all sides, the *monte* dealer keeps cool. No one can tell from Frank Lara's face that his heart is at the moment a prey to painful emotions. For, though presiding over a gaming-table and dealing out cards, his thoughts are upon something of a far different kind—something away from the saloon El Dorado. He is thinking of his day's misadventure, and bitterly too.

There is no outward sign to indicate this inward feeling. His features are immobile as those of the Sphinx, and his eyes are constantly upon the cards, as if intent upon the proper performance of his *métier*.

Only once has he looked up; when some one within hearing pronounced a name—that of Montijo.

It is nothing; two native Californians in conversation, by chance speaking of Don Gregorio. Some matter of no moment, and on changing the subject, De Lara ceases to listen to, or look at them. His eyes, returning to the cards, hide their lurid light behind long, dark lashes and half-closed lids.

For all his diligence in dealing, he seems to care little how the game goes.

Not so much as a man seated opposite to him, on the betters' side of the table. For this personage exhibits a sensitiveness approaching to anxiety. Although staking himself, and with apparent negligence, he watches the "pars" of the players with nervous eagerness; when any of them wins, looking as if he had himself lost.

Strange this conduct! For what interest can he have in the losses or gains of the betters at a *monte* bank, where all bet independently of each other? Only the banker is their adversary.

Notwithstanding, the individual in question appears to regret when the luck goes against the bank; especially when some half-drunken digger throws down a sack of dust, perhaps a hundred dollars in value, and risks it on a single turn of the cards—risks it, and wins. After a coup of this kind he seems affected as though he had a personal interest in the gains and losses of the bank.

And so has he; since he is the proprietor of it—the real *boss* of the owner. For it is Don Faustino Calderon, whose creditors thus move him.

No one around knows this, or only a few of the initiated. For he well preserves his incognito of sleeping partner, or proprietor. He sits at the table as the others; like them makes his "pars;" like them pays when he loses, and draws in his cheques when the cards turn in his favor.

In the El Dorado he is dressed differently, and scarce recognizable as the mounted man of the morning. He has thrown off his splendid *traje a caballo*, and appears in a soberer costume of city cut.

De Lara is also in changed attire, in the orthodox evening dress of the day, black coat, white vest, ruffled shirt, with diamonds gleaming like sparks among the ruffles.

Although face to face on opposite sides of the table, the two rarely look at, and never exchange speech or other token of recognition. They do not appear to know one another, beyond such acquaintance as the game may give. That they are intimately acquainted is only known to a few.

And so the play proceeds, the coins clinking, the cheques clattering, these monotonous sounds only diversified by the equally monotonous call of "Soto" this, and "Cavido" that, with now and then a "Carapo," or it may be a "Curse the luck!" from the lips of some vexed loser.

True, there are other sounds in the saloon, from other movements being continually made. For *monte* is not the only lure that decoys a crowd into the El Dorado. The drinking bar has its customers as well; a score of them standing in front of it, others constantly coming and going.

Just as the clock strikes nine, among the comers are two young men in the attire of naval officers. At a distance it is not easy to distinguish the naval uniforms of the nations; almost universally dark-blue, with gold bands and buttons. More especially is it difficult when they belong to one of the cognate branches of the great Anglo-Saxon race—English and American.

The two who have entered the El Dorado, when coming into its door, might be taken for either. Once inside the saloon, and under the light of its many lamps, the special insignia on the caps show them to belong to an American man-of-war, as also that they are midshipmen.

No need to waste time in guesses regarding them.

They will be already identified as Edward Crozier and Will Cadwallader. For sure enough it is they.

They have entered the restaurant with no particular object except to "see the elephant." They are upon their night's stroll through the streets of San Francisco, and it would not be complete without a look into the El Dorado.

Now that they are in it, they draw up to the whiskey-bar, Crozier saying:

"Come, Cad! Let's do some sparkling."

"All right," responds the descendant of the Cymri, his jolly face already a little flushed with wine.

"Pint bottle of champagne!" calls Crozier.

"We have no pints," answers the barkeeper, a grand gentleman in shirt-sleeves, with gold buckles on his embroidered braces—too grand to append the courtesy of the "sir." "Nothing less than quarts," he deigns to add.

"A quart bottle, then," cries Crozier, tossing down a doubloon to pay for it. "A gallon if you'll only have the goodness to give it us."

The sight of the gold coin with a closer inspection of his customers, showing him their distinctive dress—with perhaps some fear of getting a second sharp rejoinder—secures the attention of the Californian Ganymede, and relaxing his *hauteur*, he condescends to serve them.

While drinking the champagne, the midshipmen turn their eyes toward that end of the saloon occupied by the gamblers.

They see a crowd of men collected around a large table, three deep, some sitting, others standing. They know what it means, and that there is *monte* in their midst.

Though Cadwallader has often heard of the game, he has never played it, or been a spectator to the play.

He is therefore curious to see how the Spaniards win and lose their money. For it is a game purely Spanish and Spanish-American. Crozier has seen, played it, and promises to show him.

Tossing off their glasses, and receiving the change—not much out of a doubloon—they make approach to the *monte* table, intending to try their luck at a little betting.

It is some time before they can squeeze through the concentric rings of players, and get within betting range. Those who surround the table are not men to be pushed aside, or give way to a couple of youngsters however impatient. In the circle there are officers of far higher rank than they, lieutenants, captains, commodores, and of army men, majors, colonels, even generals. What care these for a brace of boisterous mids? or what reck the rough gold-diggers and stalwart trappers for any or all of them?

It is a chain, which, however ill-assorted in its links, is not to be rudely severed; and the midshipmen must bide their time. A little patience and their turn will come too.

Practicing this, they wait for it. And not very long. One after another the gamblers, having precedence of them, get played out. Each as he sees his last dollar swept away from him by the ruthless rake of the croupier, heaves a sigh, and retires from the table. Reluctantly, and looking back, as a stripped traveler at the footpad who has turned his pockets inside out.

Soon the outer row gets thinned, leaving spaces between. Into one of these steps Crozier, his companion pressing alongside.

Gradually they force nearer and nearer to the table's edge.

When they have at length attained it, the two turn to one another, their faces showing surprise, and something more. The expression in the eyes of both is one of stark astonishment.

For on the other side of the table, seated in a great chair, presiding over the game, and dealing out the cards, Crozier sees the man who has been making love to Carmen Montijo—his rival of the morning!

While, simultaneously, the eyes of Cadwallader rest upon his rival, the suitor of Inez!

CHAPTER XXVI.

CAVALLA EN LA PUERTA.

At sight of De Lara and Calderon the two midshipmen stand as if thunderstruck, or petrified. Speechless; for a pang has shot through the heart of both, bitter as a poisoned barb, not only depriving them of speech, but almost of breath.

Crozier feels it keenest: since what they see most concerns him. The suitor of Carmen Montijo a "sport"—a common gambler! Favored or rejected, still an aspirant to her hand! Bad enough to think of him even as her acquaintance.

Cadwallader is less affected by the discovery, though feeling it painfully, too; for although Calderon is in the circle of outside players—apparently a simple better like the rest—he remembers their companionship of the morning, and thinks of the intimate relations between the two men. If one is bad, the other cannot be much better. He already knows both to be blackguards. In all likelihood, both are professional blacklegs.

Quick as lightning, these reflections have passed through the minds of the midshipmen; but for a time neither essays to speak, their looks alone communicating to one another thoughts mutually intelligible.

Though the other gamblers, engaged in their own play, give but a glance at the new-comers, there are two of them who take note of them in a more particular manner. These are Calderon and De Lara.

The first looking along the table—for he is on the same side with them—regards the young officers with a glance, sly, furtive, almost timid.

Very different is the look of De Lara. Dealing out the cards, at sight of them he suspends the deal, his face suddenly becoming pale, his lips compressed, while a spark of angry light shoots forth from his uplifted eyes.

The passionate exhibition is short—so short that no one seems to take notice of it. If any do, they attribute it to some trifling cause—perhaps chagrin from a lost stake.

Almost instantly it is over; and the undisturbed features of the *monte* dealer resume their wonted and well-known expression of stern placidity.

Crozier and Cadwallader having recovered from their surprise, have also restored to them the facility of speech, and commence conversing; but not about the thought that tortures them. By tacit understanding, that is left to another time and better opportunity. Crozier only says:

"We'll talk of it, Will, when we get back aboard ship. That's the place for sailors to take counsel together, with clear heads, such as we want now. Ashore, I feel like a fish out of water."

"By Jove! so do I."

"Well, let's not bother about it now. Just at this moment I've got something else in my mind. The thing we're both thinking of has raised the devil in me; I feel half-mad, and intend fighting the tiger."

"Fighting the tiger! What do you mean by that, Ned?"

"You'll soon see. But if you insist upon it, I'll give you the explanation."

"Yes, do. Perhaps I may help you."

"No you can't. There's only one that can."

"Who?"

"The goddess of good luck, if it be a lady who presides over card-playing. Whether god or goddess, I intend soliciting their good graces, and if given, I'll smash the *monte* bank."

"Impossible, Crozier! There's no probability of your being able to do that."

"Not much, I admit. Still there is a chance. I've seen such a thing done before now. Bold play, and big luck combined, will do it. I'm in for the first; whether I have the last remains to be seen. In any case I'll either break the bank or lose five thousand dollars. I've got that much on me for a stake to begin with. So here goes!"

Up to this time the dialogue between the two young men has been carried on in a low tone. No one caring to listen to it. The customers of a *monte* bank are too much absorbed in their own calculations to give heed to the bets or combinations of others. If any one has looked toward the two mids, and seen them engaged in *setto voce* dialogue, it is but to suppose they are discussing between themselves which card they should place upon—*soto* or *carollo*—and whether it would be wise to stake a whole dollar on the turn, or limit their bet to the more modest sum of fifty cents.

They who may have been thus conjecturing with everybody else around the table, are taken by surprise—in fact startled—when he who appears the older of the two officers, as also senior in rank—rising up from his chair, tosses a five-hundred dollar bill upon the baize with as much nonchalance as if it were but a couple of dimes!

"Shall I give you cheques for it?" asks the croupier, after examining the bill, and seeing it is good as gold.

"No," answers Crozier, "not yet. You can give that after the bet's decided, if I win. If not, you can take the note. I place it on the queen against the knave."

"Bueno, señor!" asserts the croupier, who, like the dealer, is supposed to be a Spaniard, though in reality a native Californian.

During the interregnum, in which this little incident occurs, the cards have had a fresh shuffle, and the deal begins anew.

The two young men, hitherto unnoticed, are now closely scrutinized—Crozier broadly stared at—the cynosure of every eye.

He stands it with a cool tranquillity, that shows him impervious to petty criticism, as he is careless of the five-hundred-dollar bill lying spread upon the table. To this all eyes now turn their glances, alternately cast at it and the cards, which have commenced sliding through the fingers of the dealer.

And all in earnest expectancy—the expression of most—if it could be read—being a wish for the queen to come up first.

She does.

"*Cavalla en la puerta!*" (the queen in the door!) calls out the dealer, the words issuing reluctantly from between his teeth, while a fresh spark of anger is seen scintillating in his eyes.

All who placed on the queen have won.

"Will you take it in cheques, señor?" asks the croupier, addressing himself to Crozier, after settling the small bets, "or shall I pay you in specie?"

"You needn't pay yet; let the note lie; only cover it with another fiver. Again I go upon the queen."

Stakes are relaid—some changed, others left standing double like Crozier's five-hundred dollar bill; this now a bet for one thousand.

On goes the game, the pieces of smooth paste-board slipping silently from the jeweled fingers of De Lara. His eye is bent upon the cards as if he saw through them, or would if he could.

Whatever his wish, he has no power to change the chances. If he have any professional trick, there is no opportunity for him to practice it. There are too many eyes looking on; too many pistols and bowie-knives glancing around, too many men ready to stop any attempt at chicanery, or chastise it if attempted.

Again is he compelled to call out:

"*Cavalla en la puerta!*"

"Now, señor," says the croupier to Crozier, after settling other scores, "you want your money, I suppose?"

"Not yet; I can afford to wait a little longer. I again double the bet, and am still contented with the queen."

The dealing proceeds, with two thousand dollars lying on the "cavalla" to Crozier's account, and ten times as much belonging to miscellaneous betters. For now that the bank seems to be running for the young officer, all place their "pars" beside his.

Once again:

"*Cavalla en la puerta!*"

And again Crozier gives instructions for his bet to be doubled. It is now four thousand dollars.

The others, still believing in his run of luck, double too; and the bets against the bank foot up to at least five times the amount of Crozier's.

The dealer begins to look anxious, a little downhearted. Still more anxious and lower in heart appears a man on the opposite side—Calderon.

On the contrary, Crozier is as cool as an icicle—and far more firm than when he first stood before the table. His nerves, then unstrung by what he saw, are now knit by what he intends doing, hoping to do it.

And once again:

"*Cavalla en la puerta!*"

There is a pause after the bets are paid. The dealer seems inclined to discontinue, for still lying upon the queen is Crozier's big stake, again duplicated, and now counting eight thousand.

Asked if he intends to let it remain, he replies, sneeringly:

"Of course I do; I insist upon it. Once more I go for the queen; let those who like back the knave."

"Go on! go on!" is the cry around the table, from many voices, speaking in a tone of demand.

De Lara glances at Calderon, furtively, but to those observing it with a look of interrogation.

Whatever the sign, or answer, it decides him to go on with the deal.

The bets are again made, to his dismay, almost everybody laying upon the queen; and, as before, doubling their stakes.

And, in like proportion, is increased the interest in the game. It is too intense for any display of noisy excitement now; and there is less throughout the saloon. For many of the bar roysterers, standing in scattered groups, have joined the players at the table, crowding three-deep behind, and peering over their shoulders with as much eager earnestness as if a man were dying in their midst.

The call at length comes, not in clear voice, or tone exultant; it is wrung reluctantly from the lips of the *monte* dealer, for it is again an adverse verdict for the bank.

In choking utterance he says:

"*Cavallo en la puerta.*"

Along with the words he dashes the cards down, scattering the pack all over the table; then rising excitedly from his chair, calls out in clearer tone:

"Gentlemen, I'm sorry to tell you that the bank's broke."

CHAPTER XXVII.

AFTER THE SMASH.

"The bank's broke!"

These words, that have oft startled the ear, and made woe in many a heart.

As they leap from De Lara's lips, all sitting around the table spring to their feet, as if the chairs underneath them had suddenly become converted into iron at a white heat.

They rise simultaneously, as though all were united in a chain, elbow and elbow together.

But while thus gesturing alike, very different is the expression upon their faces. Some simply show surprise, others look incredulous, while not a few give evidence of anger.

The same variety of expression marks the features of the outside ring of betters, already on their feet, for they have a like interest in the startling announcement.

For an instant there is silence around the table—the surprise, the incredulity, the anger, having suspended speech. The same all over the saloon. The drinkers lingering at the bar have caught the three last words, spoken by De Lara, and well understand their import. No longer is heard the clink of ivory cheques, or the metallic ring of doubloons and dollars; no longer the dumping down of decanters, or the clinking of glasses. Instead, a stillness so profound that one entering the apartment at this moment, might fancy it a Quakers' meeting, but for the symbols seen there—anything but Quakerish. Easier to conceive it a gambling hell, represented in wax-work.

The silence is of the shortest, as also the immobility of the men comprising the different groups; only for a half-score seconds; then there is noise enough, with plenty of gesticulation. A roar arises, resounding through the saloon, while men rush about madly, as if in the inner court of a lunatic asylum.

The maddest are those who have shown anger, they who are losers by the breaking of the bank. Some of them have large bets still lying on the table, which they now know will not be paid; the croupier has told them so, confessing his cash-box cleared out at the last payment.

Some gather up their gold or notes, and stow them away in safety, growling, but contented that things are no worse; others are not so lenient; they do not believe there is sufficient cause for the suspension, and insist upon being paid; they rail at the proprietor of the bank, adding menace. De Lara is the man thus marked; they see him before them, grandly dressed, glittering in jewels and gold; they talk of stripping him of his *bijouterie*.

"No, gentlemen," he protests, with a sardonic sneer, "not that, if you please—not yet. First hear me, and then it will be time to strike."

"What have you got to say?" demanded one, with his fists full of ivory counters—protested cheques.

"Only that I'm not the owner of this concern, and never have been."

"Who is? who has?" ask several at the same time.

"Well, that I can't tell you just now; and what's more, I won't. No, *por Dios.*"

The gambler says this with emphasis and an air of sullen determination that has its effect upon the questioners, even the more importunate. For a time it stays their talk, as well as action. Seeing this, he follows it up with further speech, earnest as ever, but slightly conciliatory.

"As I've said, gentlemen, I'm not the boss in this business; only the dealer of the cards. You ask who's been owner of the bank, now broke. It's natural enough you should want to know; but it's just as natural that it ain't my business to tell you; if I did, it would be a shabby trick; and I take it you're all men enough to understand that. If there's any who isn't, he can have my card, and call upon me at his convenience. My name's Francisco de Lara, or Frank Lara, if you like, for short. I can be found here, or anywhere else in Frisco, at such time as may suit anxious inquirers; and if there's any of you want me now, and won't wait, I'm good this minute for pistols across the table. Yes, *por Dios!*"

"Now, if there's any gentleman present who'd like a little amusement of that kind, let him come on! It'll be a change from the *monte*. For my part, I'm tired shuffling cards, and would like to rest my fingers on a trigger. Which of you feels disposed to give me a chance? Don't all speak at once!"

No one feels or seems disposed, and no one speaks. At least, in hostile tone, or in answer to his challenge.

Instead, half a dozen surround the "sport," and express their admiration of his pluck, while several challenge him to an encounter of drinks, not pistols.

Facing toward the bar, they vociferate, "Champagne!"

Contented with the turn things have taken, and proud of the volley of invitations, De Lara accepts. Soon the vintage of France is seen effervescing in a score of glasses, and he stands drinking in the midst of his admirers.

Other groups draw up against the counter, while twos and solitary tipplers fill the spaces between.

Though the temple of Fortune is in ruins, the shrine of Bacchus flourishes now more than ever. For to those already worshipping the jolly god, other devotees are added, in the gamblers thrown out of play. The losers drink to drown disappointment, while the winners quaff cups, and freely dispense them, in the exhilaration of success.

If a bad night for the bank, it is a good one for the bar. Decanters are quickly emptied, and bottles go down among the dead men.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HARRY BLEW HOMELESS.

Just as the exciting scenes, above described, are being enacted in the El Dorado, Harry Blew passes its doors.

Could the sailor see through walls, he would enter. The sight of Crozier would attract him inside; and when there, he might stay awhile, for more reasons than one.

One has been already in his mind. Observing that the young gentlemen were bent on a spree, and knowing the dangers of such in San Francisco, it had occurred to him to keep along with, and look after them. But the thought had come too late, as that of asking assistance for himself.

A glance into the gambling saloon would have brought both opportunities back again; and Harry Blew, instead of continuing to wander hungry through the streets, would have soon had supper, and after it a bed, either in some respectable tavern, or in his old bunk aboard the Crusader.

It is not to be. He can know nothing of the friends that are so near; and, sauntering past the El Dorado, as he has done a score of other restaurants, lighted with like brilliancy, he soon after quickens his pace, and strikes out in quest of Silvester.

Under the belief that Don Tomas is a ship-agent, he has hopes that his office may yet be open—San Francisco is not like an old seaport, where house-room is cheap and abundant. Every foot of roof-shelter counts; and Don Tomas may be accustomed to sleep by the side of his ledger. If so, he, Harry Blew, may be permitted to stretch himself along the floor, or get a shake-down in some adjoining shed. Just now he would be only too glad to stretch his limbs along an old sack in a store-room, or even the naked floor if need be. For he is tired perambulating the streets, fairly fagged out.

Tacking from corner to corner, now and then hitching up his trowsers to give freer play to his feet, he at length issues out upon the open space lying along the bay. In his week's cruising about the town he has acquired some scant knowledge of its topography, and knows that this is the street printed on Don Tomas's card. It but needs to look up the number.

It takes him a considerable time. Along the water's edge the houses are irregularly set, and numbered with like irregularity. Besides, there is not much light; the street lamps burning whale oil, dim, and at long distances apart. It is with difficulty he can make out the figures upon the doors.

However, he is at length successful, and deciphers on one the number he is in search of, as also the name, "Silvester," painted on a piece of tin attached to the side post.

A survey of the house—indeed a single glance—convinces him he has been searching to no purpose. It is a small wooden-walled structure, not much bigger than a sentry-box, evidently only an office, with no pretensions to a dwelling. Still it is roomy enough to admit a man lying at full length along its floor, and Harry Blew, as already said, would be glad of so disposing himself for the night.

There may be a clerk, or some such creature inside; though the one window, corresponding in size to the shanty itself, looks black and forbidding.

With no very sanguine hopes, he lays hold of the door-handle and gives it a twist. Locked, as he expected.

The test might have satisfied him, but it does not, and he knocks. At first, timidly; then a little louder, and then with a good round rap of his knuckles, hard as horn. At the same time he puts the question, "Is there any one within?" in English, almost instantly duplicating it in Spanish. For he remembers that Don Tomas Silvester, as also his employees, should speak the latter language.

"*Ambre la puerta!*" he adds, after the interrogation.

Neither to the question, nor demand, is there any response. Only the echo of his own voice, reverberating along the line of houses, and dying away in the distance, as it mingles with the sough of the sea.

No use speaking, or knocking again. Undoubtedly the office of the ship's agent is closed for the night, and his clerks, if there be any, have their sleeping quarters elsewhere.

Forced to this conclusion, though sadly dissatisfied with it, the sailor turns away from the door, and once more goes cruising along the street.

But now, with no definite point to steer for, he makes short tacks and turns like a ship sailing under an unfavorable wind, or as one disregarding the points of the compass, with nobody at the wheel.

After thus beating about for nearly another hour, he again returns to the water's edge. His instincts have conducted him thither, as the seal after an inland excursion finds his way back to the beach.

If he could but swim like a seal! The thought occurs to him as he stands looking over the sea in the direction of the Crusader. If he could but reach the ship, all his troubles would be over and soon forgotten amid his old chums of the forecastle.

It can not be the man-of-war is anchored more than three miles off. Strong swimmer though he knows himself to be, it is too far. Besides, a fog has suddenly sprung up, overspreading the bay, and the ship is hidden from sight. Even those lying close in to the shore can be but faintly seen through the film; and only their larger spars, the smaller ones with the rigging looking like the threads of a spider's web.

Downhearted, almost despairing, Harry Blew halts upon the beach.

What is he to do? Lie down on the sand, and there go to sleep?

There are times when on the shores of San Francisco Bay this would not be much of a hardship. But not now. It is the season of winter, when the fogs of the great Pacific current, coming from latitudes further north, roll in through the golden gate, spreading themselves over the estuary inside. A' though not frosty, they are cold enough to be uncomfortable.

That on this particular night has brought with it a chill, drizzling rain; and the sailor, standing in its shroud, feels that he is fast getting wet. If he do not find cover he will soon be soaked to the skin.

Looking around for something to shelter him, his eye rests upon a boat lying bottom upward on the beach. It is an old skiff that has bilged, and been abandoned as useless, or upturned to receive repairs.

No matter what its history, it offers him the hospitality so scurvily refused by the Sailors' Home. If it cannot afford him supper or a bed, it promises protection against the rain.

This, beginning to come down in big pattering drops, decides him; and, crawling under the cap-sized skiff, he lays himself at full length along the sand.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A SUPPER CARTE-BLANCHE.

The excitement in the saloon El Dorado, consequent on the smashing of the *monte* bank, is soon over. Occurrences of like kind—often with incidents far more tragical—are too common in San Francisco to cause any long-sustained emotion. Within the hour will arise some new event equally stirring, leaving the old to live only in the recollection of those who have been the chief actors in it.

So with the breaking of Frank Lara's bank. A stranger entering the saloon, only an hour after, from what he will there see, can not tell that an incident of so serious nature has occurred; for in less than an hour after, the bank is again in full go, as if its play had never been suspended.

The only difference observable is that Frank Lara no longer presides over it, a new dealer occupying his vacated chair, while another croupier has replaced him whose cash receipts ran suddenly short of the disbursements.

The explanation is simply that there has been a change of owners; a celebrated American "sport" taking up the abandoned bank, and opening it anew.

With a few exceptions the customers are the same, while the crowd around the table has not sensibly decreased. Most of the old players have returned to it, while the places of those defected and gone off to other gambling hells are filled by fresh arrivals.

A small number who think they have had play enough for that night, have left the El Dorado for good.

Among these last are the two officers, whose visit proved so prejudicial to the interests of Frank Lara, or those of his unproclaimed employer.

He, too, with his confederate has quitted the place; but whither gone, no one knows, or seems to care. In a gambling saloon the fortunes of a fallen man soon cease to interest those who are themselves struggling to mount up.

Crozier and his companion have left the room first; De Lara and his lot a little after.

We shall follow the former, who still remain in the light; for the latter, after parting with the El Dorado, have plunged into darkness.

The midshipmen do not go directly aboard their ship; they know that a boat will be awaiting them at a certain landing-place, as Crozier has directed. But the appointment is for a much later hour, and in the interval there will be time enough for them to take supper ashore.

They have fallen in with other young officers, naval like themselves, though not of their own ship, nor yet their own navy or nation, but belonging to one cognate, and kindred. Through the freemasonry of their common profession, all have fraternized, and are to sup together.

Crozier has invited the strangers to a repast of the most *recherche* kind that can be obtained at the grandest hotel in San Francisco—this the "Parker House."

He adds humorously that he is able to afford it.

And so he is. Besides the five thousand dollars with which he entered the El Dorado, he has brought many other thousands out of it; his pockets are crammed—plethoric—with notes and gold, as also those of Cadwallader, who helps him to carry the cash.

Part of the gold they have been able to get rid of by changing it for notes—paying discount on the exchange; yet they are still weighted—"laden down like hucksters' donkeys"—jokingly says Cadwallader, as they walk toward the Parker House.

A private room is engaged; and, according to promise, Crozier orders a supper of the costliest kind, with *carte blanche* for the best wines. Champagne being at twenty-five dollars the bottle, hock the same, and South Side Maderia double, his pockets will be a little depleted. But what cares he now, or ever? It would have been all the same if in "fighting the tiger" he had got torn by its claws. He is and always has been profuse in expenditure, reckless as he is rich, generous-hearted and open-handed, as all New Yorkers are.

The supper ordered in the double-quick, with prompt rapidity appears; quicker in San Francisco than in any other city of the world; quicker as costlier. Ay, in grand style, too, and better worth the money, for the "Queen City of the Pacific" excels in the science of gastronomy. Amid her canvas sheds and weather-boarded houses can be obtained dishes of every kind known to Christendom as to Pagandom; the *cuisine* of France, Spain, Italy; the roast beef of the Old England, with the "pork and beans" of the New; the *gumbo* of Guinea, and *sauer kraut* of Germany, side by side with the bird's nest soup and sea-slugs of China.

Had Lucullus lived in these days, he would have forsaken the banks of the Tiber, and selected San Francisco for his home.

The repast furnished by the Parker House is a *la Russe*—soon served, it is as speedily dispatched. For unfortunately there is a circumstance that forbids

the leisurely enjoyment of the viands, to a certain extent marring that of the moment.

It is the old enemy, Time. Crozier and Cadwallader, as also the other officers, have to be on their ships at the striking of twelve.

It is now after eleven, and they will have but time to get aboard, even by a little rushing of their boats.

Reluctantly breaking up their hilarious company, the *bon vivants* prepare to depart. For this purpose they vacate the supper-room, stepping out into the large saloon of the hotel, like all such furnished with a drinking-bar.

Before separating, and while buttoning up against the cold night air, Crozier calls out:

"Come, gentlemen, one more glass at the bar—the stirrup cup."

Strange that in California, as elsewhere, this should always be the conclusion to a night of revelry; no matter how much wine quaffed around the supper-table, in the private room of a hotel, the carousal is not deemed complete without a last drink taken standing at its public bar.

Giving way to the universal custom, the officers range themselves along an unoccupied part of the marble slab.

Bending over which the polite barkeeper asks:

"What is it to be, gentlemen?"

There is a moment of hesitation, the gentlemen, already well wined, scarce knowing what to call for. Crozier cuts the Gordian knot by proposing:

"A round of punches *a la Romaine*."

Soon the cooling beverage, compounded with snow from the Sierra Nevada, appears upon the counter, in huge glasses filled high with the crystals, a spoon surmounting each, for punch *a la Romaine* is not to be drank, but eaten.

Their lips warm with wine, a few moments suffice for this; and the *courines* having spooned down to the bottom of their glasses, turn away from the bar, and bid adieu for the night; along with these expressing hopes, and tendering promises, soon to come together again.

CHAPTER XXX.

A SUSPECTED PARTY.

CROZIER'S invited guests go off at once; he with Cadwallader staying to settle accounts.

While standing before the bar, waiting for the bill to be brought, they cast a glance around the room.

At first careless, it soon becomes fixed upon a group seen at the further end of the saloon, and near one of the doors leading out into the street.

There are many other groups, for the room is of grand dimensions, besides being the most popular place of resort, as also the most respectable, in San Francisco.

Standing along the line of its drinking-bar, and over its broad, white, sanded floor, are scores of men of all qualities and kinds, in almost every variety of costume.

They composing the group that has attracted the attention of the two midshipmen, show nothing particular in their appearance—that is, to the eye of one unacquainted with them. In all there are four of them, two having cloth cloaks, the other two having their shoulders shrouded under *serapes*.

Nothing in all that. The night is cold, and they are near the door, to all appearance intending soon to go out. They have only paused to exchange a parting word, as if they designed to separate before issuing into the street.

Though the spot where they stand is a good deal in darkness—the most shady corner of the saloon—and it is difficult to get sight of their faces, the difficulty is increased by the cloaks and *serapes* held high around their throats. Crozier and Cadwallader have not only seen but recognized them. A glance at them caught before the muffling was made, has enabled the young officers to identify three of the gentlemen in shadow as De Lara, Calderon, and the *ci-devant* croupier. The fourth, whose face they have also seen, is a personage not known to them, but judging by his features, a suitable consort for the other three.

On identifying them, which he does first, Crozier whispers to his companion:

"See, Cad! look yonder! Our friends from the El Dorado."

"By Jove, it's they, sure enough! Do you think they're following us?"

"I shouldn't a bit wonder. I was only surprised that they didn't do something when they had us at their heels. After the heavy draw I made on his *monte* bank, I expected no less than that Mr. Lara would attempt to renew his acquaintance with me; all the more from his having been so free of it in the morning. Instead he and his friend seem studiously to have avoided coming near us, not even casting a look in our direction. That rather puzzles me."

"It needn't, Ned. After what you gave him I should think he'd feel shy of trying it on you again."

"No, that's not the explanation. Blackleg though the fellow be, he's got pluck enough for anything. He gave proof of it in the El Dorado, defying and backing out everybody. It was a grand exhibition of courage, Cad; and to tell the truth, I couldn't myself help admiring it; and can't now. When I saw him presiding over a gambling table, and dealing out the cards, I at once made up my mind that it would never do to meet him, even if he challenged me. Now I've decided different, and if he calls me out, I'll give him a chance to recover a little of his lost reputation. I shall, upon my honor."

"But why should you, Ned? A 'sport,' a professional gambler! The thing would be simply ridiculous."

"Nothing of the kind—not here in California. On the contrary, I should play the ridiculous role if I refused to give him satisfaction. It remains to be seen whether he will seek it according to the correct code."

"That he won't; at least I don't think he will."

"I'm beginning to be of that opinion myself. From the way the four have got their heads together it looks as if they meant mischief. They may have been abiding their opportunity, waiting to get us two alone."

"What a pity we didn't see them before our friends went off. They're good fellows, those John Bulls, and would have stood by us."

"No doubt they would. But it's too late now. They're beyond hailing distance, and we've got to

take care of ourselves. Get your dirk ready, and have your fingers handy to the butt of one of Mr. De Lara's shooting-irons."

"All right, Ned. I've got it that way. By Jove! it would be a good joke to give the fellow a bullet out of one of his own pistols."

"No joke to him. Nor any joking matter to us, if they're meditating an attack. Though we disarmed Lara in the morning, he'll be freshly provided, and with weapons a-plenty. I'll warrant, all four have got a battery apiece, concealed under their cloaks. They appear as if concocting some scheme; which we'll soon know all about, likely before leaving the room. Certainly they're up to something."

"Four hundred and seventy-five dollars, gentlemen!"

The financial statement is made by the barkeeper presenting the bill.

"There!" cries Crozier, flinging down a five-hundred-dollar note. "Let that settle it. You can keep the change for yourself."

"Thank ye," duly responds the Californian dispenser of drinks, taking the twenty-five-dollar tip, with less show of gratitude than a London waiter would give for a sixpence—little as this would be.

Turning to take departure, the young officers again look across the saloon, to learn how the hostile party has disposed itself.

To their surprise the gamblers are gone, having disappeared while the account was being settled.

"I don't like the look of it, Will," says Crozier, in a whisper; "less now than ever. No doubt we'll find them outside. Well; we can't stay here all night. If they attack us, we must do our best. Take a firm gripe on your pistol, with forefinger close to the trigger—and if any of them show sign of shooting, see that you fire first. Follow me, and keep close!"

On delivering these injunctions, Crozier starts for the door, his comrade following as directed.

Both sally out into the street; and for a while stand gazing around them.

People are there in numbers, some lounging by the portico of the hotel, others passing along the pavement. But none in cloaks or *serapes*; at least—not in sight.

The gamblers must have gone clear away.

"After all, we may have been misjudging them," remarks Crozier, as is his nature, giving way to a generous impulse. "I can hardly think that a fellow who's shown such courage would turn out a common cutthroat, and set upon us unfairly. Maybe they were putting their heads together to correct the challenges, and have gone elsewhere to write them out? If that's it, we may expect to hear from them in the morning. It looks all serene. Anyhow, we can't stand dallying here. If we're not aboard by eight bells, old Bracebridge 'll masthead us for a week. Heave along, my hearty!"

So saying, he leads off, Cadwallader close on his quarter—both a little unsteady in their steps, from the combined spoils of the gambling hell, and the wine at the Parker, followed by punches *a la Romaine*.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A QUARTETTE OF CONSPIRATORS.

THE spot upon which Harry Blew has stretched his body is soft as a feather-bed. For all that he does not fall asleep. The rain, percolating through the sand, soon gets under the skiff, and saturating his couch, makes it uncomfortable. This, with the chilly air, keeps him awake.

He lies listening to the sighing of the sea, and the big drops clouting down on the planks overhead.

Soon other sounds salute his ear, distinguishable as human voices engaged in conversation.

As he continues to listen, the voices grow louder, the men who converse evidently drawing nearer.

In a few seconds they are up to the boat, and come to a stop alongside it.

Though pausing in their steps, they continue their talk, in tones excited and earnest; so loud, also, that he can hear every word. He cannot see the speakers; only their feet, and the lower part of their limbs from the knees downward. Of these there are four pairs, two of them in trousers of the ordinary cut, the other two in *culottes*.

But that all four are Californians, or Spaniards, he can tell from the tongue in which they are conversing. It is Spanish. A lucky chance that the sailor understands this—enough to make out their meaning. It is fortunate, less for himself than for friends that are dear to him.

The first intelligible speech that reaches his ear is an interrogatory.

"You're sure, Don Manuel, they'll come this way?"

"Quite sure, Calderon. When I stood by them at the hotel bar, I heard the younger tell one of the British officers that their boat was to be at the wooden wharf—the new pier, as you know. To reach that, they must pass this way. There's no other."

"It can't be long before they make appearance. They were about leaving the hotel as we came away."

This conjecture is by a third speaker, as can be told by the voice.

"No knowing when they'll appear," rejoins he addressed as Calderon. "They may stay to take another *lupa*. These Saxons never get satisfied with drink."

"All the better if they do take another. Our work will be easier."

"It may not be so easy for all that. Young as they are, they're very *demonios*, and either can stand as much drink as would kill one of us Californians. Besides, they're both well armed, and will battle like grizzly bears."

"You intend killing them, De Lara?"

"Of course," answers a voice now heard for the first time. "We must. It would be madness to let them go, even if we'd got our money back. One, as I know—he called Crozier—is a rich fellow, and can afford to buy justice even here in San Francisco. If we let them escape, he'd set the *alguazils* after us like hounds upon a trail. Even if they should not recognize us, now in the darkness, he'd be sure to suspect me, and Calderon also. *Carajo!* we must kill them!"

Harry Blew hears the cold-blooded proposal. He understands its terrible significance. He already knows that the young officers have been ashore, and now discovers they are still in the town. These four

men are about to waylay, rob and murder them. What is meant by getting their money back is the only part of the conversation he does not comprehend.

It is made clear as they continue.

"You agree to that, *amigos?*" asks the same voice that has counseled killing.

"*Si—si—si!*" is the simultaneous response of the others.

"There's nothing unfair about taking back our own, I, Frank Lara, say so. It was Crozier who brought about the breaking of the bank. And did it in a mean, dastardly way. He was half-drunk while he made his bets, and let them lie because he didn't know any better. He had the luck and won. We've lost, and must make good our losses, best way we can. If we could do it without killing the *gringos* I'd say let them live. But we can't, and be safe ourselves."

"*Chingara!* let's kill them, then, and no more words about it."

The stern, merciless verdict is in the voice of Don Manuel; the other conspirators signify assent to it, after which there is an interval of silence.

Harry Blew now knows all. The midshipmen have been gaming, have won money—broken a *monte* bank, and are expected to come along, carrying the cash thus acquired.

The four men who talk so coolly of killing them are the gamblers and their confederates.

What is the sailor to do? How can he save Crozier and Cadwallader? Both are armed—Crozier with his sword, the other having his dirk. Besides, they have pistols on them. Harry saw that, while they were talking to him in the Sailor's Home. But then they will be taken unawares—in the dark—shot or struck down without seeing the hand that does it? Even if warned and ready, there would be but two against four—the latter no doubt carrying weapons of every kind. The sailor himself is altogether unarmed. His jack-knife is no longer on his hip. It is gone, hypothecated to pay for his last jorum of grog. And the young men have been drinking freely, as he has gathered from what the ruffians said; they may be inebriated, or enough so to render them incautious, off their guard. Who would be expecting assassination? Who ever is, save a Mexican himself? Altogether unlikely that the merry mids will be thinking of such a thing. On the contrary, they will come carelessly on, to fall like ripe corn before the sickle of the reaper.

The thought of such a fate for his friends fills the sailor with apprehension; and once again he asks himself how it is to be averted.

The four conspirators are not more than as many feet from the boat. Reaching out his hand, he could gripe them by the ankles, without altering his recumbent attitude an inch.

By doing this he might give the guilty scoundrels such a scare as would cause them to retreat, and so baffle their design.

The thought flits across his brain, but is instantly abandoned. They are not of such tender stuff as to be scared at shadows. By their talk two are desperadoes; and to show himself or make known his presence now, would be but adding another victim to those they have already doomed to death.

What is he to do?

For the third time the sailor asks himself the question, still unable to answer it.

While painfully speculating, his brain laboring to grasp some feasible plan of defense against the threatened danger, there is a slight change promised in the situation. He is warned of it through some words spoken by one of the conspirators. The voice is Calderon's. He says:

"*Amigos*, we're not in a good position here. They may sight us too soon. To make things safe and sure, we must drop on them before they can draw their weapons; else some of us may get dropped ourselves."

"Where would we be better? I don't see. We can crouch in the shadow of the boat."

"Why not crawl under it? There Argus himself couldn't see us."

Harry Blew's heart beats at the double-quick, and so loudly as to be audible under the hollow carapace of planks. His time seems come; and he already fancies four pistols held to his head, or the same number of poniards entering his ribs.

With him it is a moment of vivid anxiety—a crisis dread, terrible, almost agonizing.

Fortunately it is but for a moment, ending on the instant. He is relieved at hearing them say:

"Not that won't do. We'd have trouble scrambling in and out again. While about it, they'd hear or see us, and take to their heels. You must remember it's but a short way to where their boat will be waiting for them, with some eight or ten jack-tars in it. If they got there before we overtook them, the tables would be turned on us. Instead of killing them, we'd stand a good chance of being ourselves killed, or captured."

"You're right, Calderon," says another of the controlling voices, recognized as that of Don Manuel. "It won't do to go under the boat, and there's no need for us to stay by it. *Mira!* Yonder's a better place, under the shadow of that wall. There they can't possibly see us, until near enough for us to spring out and intercept them. They must pass within twenty feet of it."

"The very place," assents Calderon, the other two, as in echo, signifying the same.

After which the four figures separate from the side of the skiff, and gliding silently across the strip of sandy beach, disappear like specters under the shadow of the wall.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CRUSADERS TO THE RESCUE.

"DASH it! What am I to do?"

It is Harry Blew still lying under the skiff, who thus interrogates himself.

For the fourth time, and more emphatically, but also in less dubious accent—less despairingly.

True, the conspiring assassins have only stepped aside, seeking cover from which they may more conveniently pounce upon their quarry, and are even surer of striking it.

But their changed position has left the sailor free to change his, which he now bethinks him of doing.

Their talk has told him of a boat from the man-of-war awaiting somewhere to take the officers back to their ship. His own past experience tells him where

that somewhere is, though he has also this information later and more direct from the converse of the confederates. He knows the wharf referred to, and the stair at which the Crusaders will be sure to bring to. It may be the cutter with her full crew of ten, or it may be but the gig. No matter which, there can not be less than two oarsmen, and this will be sufficient. Two tars, himself to count three, with the threatened officers to tot up five—that will be more than a match for four Mexican-Californians—four times four, thinks Harry Blew; even though the sailors, like himself, be unarmed, or with nothing but their jack-knives and boat-hooks.

He has no fear if he can but bring it to an encounter of this kind. The question is, can he do so?

First, is it possible to get out from under the skiff, and away unobserved?

This question is answered by a glance toward the spot where the gamblers have placed themselves in ambush.

It is possible, or appears to be. He can not see them under the shadow of the wall; and the combined fog and darkness will favor him.

So far well; and he may at once make for the man-of-war's boat, with the intention of bringing her crew to the rescue.

He is only stayed by a second self-interrogation, of consequence equally important: *will he be in time?*

The wharf at which the boat should be, is not quite a quarter of a mile off, and will take but a few minutes to reach it.

Should he succeed in eluding the vigilance of the villains, will it be possible to get to the stair, communicate with the boat's crew, and bring them back before the officers come up?

The answer to this interrogatory is far from definite or satisfactory; and, the reflection springing from it appalls him. In his absence the doomed men may arrive. He may return to find their bodies lying lifeless along the sand, their pockets rifled, the murderers and plunderers gone!

The thought holds him irresolute, doubtful what is the best course to take.

Shall he remain till the midshipmen make their appearance, then rush out and give such warning as he can, throwing himself by their side, and doing his best in defending them?

Unarmed, he can not do much—against pistols and stiletos he will scarce count as a combatant. And they coming along heedless may not have their weapons at hand. It may but end in all being slaughtered together.

On the other side he may be discovered stealing off, pursued, and overtaken?

He has less fear of the last. Despite his sea-legs, he knows himself a swift runner. It is only a question of getting start. In less than five minutes he may reach the stair; in five more return.

But the midshipmen meanwhile? At any moment they may arrive; and then all will be over?

A terrible struggle agitates the heart of Harry Blew, in his thoughts a conflict agonizing. On either side are *pros* and *cons*, requiring calm deliberation.

But there is no time for this; he must act.

He decides to go in quest of the Crusaders. It will take but ten minutes; surely he will be back in time?

He has confidence in Crozier, as Cadwallader. If attacked they will not yield at once, but make a tough fight for it. He coming on with the Crusaders can cry out, and cheer them with the prospect of approaching help.

All this passes through the mind of the sailor, in a tenth part of the time it has taken to tell it. Indeed almost instantaneously.

And with like rapidity, after having resolved himself, he hastens to carry out his resolve.

Sprawling out like a lizard from beneath the capsize skiff, he glides off silently along the strand.

At first, with slow, cautious steps and crouchingly, but soon erect in a rapid run.

He makes speed as if for the saving of his life; for it is to save two lives almost dear as his own.

The five minutes are not up, when his footsteps resound along the hollow wooden wharf. In less than five seconds after he stands at the head of the sea stairway, looking down.

Below is a boat with men in it, half a score of them, seated on the thwarts, some lolling over against the gunwales, asleep. At a glance he can tell it to be the cutter of the Crusader.

A hail startles them into activity; and all recognize the voice of their old shipmate.

"Quick," he cries. "Quick, mates, come along with me! Don't stay to ask questions. Enough for you to know that Mr. Crozier is in danger. *Crusaders, to the rescue!*"

It proves enough; the tars don't need to be told more. They start from their recumbent attitudes and spring out of the boat.

Then, rushing up the steps, cluster around their old comrade.

They have not waited for instructions to arm themselves. His words with their tone warning them of some shore hostility, they have instantaneously made ready to meet it. Each has laid hold of the weapon nearest to his hand; some a knife, some an oar, others a boat-hook.

"Heave along, lads!" cries Harry Blew, and they all heave at his heels, rushing after as if to extinguish a fire aboard ship.

Soon they are coursing along the strand toward the upturned boat. They go silently and without explanation. If they did they could not get it. For Harry Blew is panting, breathless, almost unable to speak. But five words issue from his throat, jerked out separately, and in hoarse, broken utterance. They are:

"Crozier—Cadwallader—waylaid—robbers—murderers!"

Enough to spur the Crusaders to their best speed, if not already at it.

But they are; every man of them straining his legs to their utmost.

As they rush on, cleaving the thick fog, Harry Blew at their head, listens intently. As yet he hears no sound; only the monotonous ripple of the sea, and the murmur of distant voices in the streets of the town. But no cries—no shouts—or shots; nothing to tell of a conflict.

"Thanks be to the Lord!" says the brave sailor, devoutly. "We'll be in time to save them."

He does not say this aloud. For loud words he has

no wind to spare. The thanksgiving is only muttered.

Scarce has it passed from his lips when he comes in sight of the skiff. And almost simultaneously of two figures upon the beach beyond. They are of human shape, through the fog looking large as giants.

Harry Blew is not beguiled by the deception. At a glance he knows them to be the forms of the two midshipmen—magnified by the mist. No others are likely to be coming that way, for he can see they are approaching.

And, as shown by their careless, swaggering gait, unsuspecting of danger, little dreaming of an ambushade, that in sixty seconds more may deprive them of existence—lay them lifeless along the sand.

To him, hurrying to prevent this catastrophe, it is a moment of intense apprehension—of dread, chilling fear. He sees that the midshipmen are almost up to the place where the assassins should spring out upon them. In another instant he may hear the cracking of pistols and see them flashing through the fog.

Expecting it even before he can speak, he nevertheless cries out:

"Halt there, Mr. Crozier! We're Crusaders. Stop where you are. Don't make another step, or you'll be shot at. There's four men under the shadow of that wall waitin' to murder ye. Do ye know the names of Calderon and Lara?"

Long before the sailor has reached this point in his disjointed chapter of sounds, the midshipmen—for it is they—make pause. The more promptly from having been already prepared for a surprise.

They have not stopped a moment too soon. Almost simultaneously with the last words spoken, the shadowed spot is lit up by pistol flashes, and along with them the reports.

From the direction of the jets it is evident the young officers are aimed at. Both have good reason to know it by the "tzip-tzip" of bullets that like bees go buzzing past their ears.

Neither feels touched; and, bounding forward, they come face to face with the Crusaders, all running, with Harry Blew at their head, face toward the wall, and rush straight for the assailants in shadow.

The intent is to close upon, capture, or kill them.

None of the three things come to pass. The shadowy space, for an instant lighted up by the blazing of the pistols, has returned to its obscurity. The scoundrels have escaped!

Some figures are seen in the distance moving off along a dark, narrow lane, and Crozier brings his Colt's revolver to bear upon them, with his finger upon the trigger.

But it may not be they; and, stayed by this uncertainty, he lowers the muzzle, replacing the pistol in his pocket.

There is no thought about the baffled assassins coming back. It could be seen that they went off like scared sheep.

"No use going after them now," says Crozier.

"We know their names, and it's an affair that'll keep till the morning. Then we shall see if there's any law in San Francisco. Thanks, my brave Crusaders! you came on the nick of time. Here's a hundred-dollar bill to be broken among you. Now, let's get aboard! And you, Harry Blew, must sleep once more on your old ship."

Harry joyfully accepts the invitation and merrily spends the remainder of the night in the forecabin of the Crusader.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN FLIGHT.

A COUNTRY house, ten miles distant from San Francisco, in a south-westerly direction.

It stands back from the bay, half-way between it and the Pacific, among the hills that, coming from the south—a spur of the Coast Range—form a breakwater to the outside ocean; on its west bounding the great landlocked estuary that has only the Golden Gate for an entrance.

Though built of mud bricks—the sort made by the Israelites in Egypt—and without any pretension to architectural style, the house in question is, in Californian parlance, a *hacienda*. For it is the headquarters of a grazing estate, whose pastures extend some distance around it.

It has never been a *ganaderia* of the first class; and now less than second; for it shows signs of decay. Its walls are weather-wasted, here and there cracked and crumbling; its doors have seen no paint for years, and, opening or shutting, creak upon rusty hinges; its *corrales* contain no cattle, nor could they without mending of their fences, at intervals broken and breached.

The place might appear an uninhabited ruin, but for some *peons* sauntering listlessly around, and a barefooted damsel or two standing disheveled by the door, or squatting over the *metate*, squeezing out the maize-dough for the eternal *tortillas*.

Notwithstanding its neglected appearance the house has an owner; and, despite their indolence, the lounging *leperos* outside and slatternly wretches within have a master.

He is not often at home; but, when he is, they address him as Don Faustino. Spanish-American servants rarely add the surname. If these did, they would call him Don Faustino Calderon. For he is the owner of the decayed dwelling.

Only at intervals do his domestics see him. He spends nearly all his time elsewhere—most of it in Yerba Buena, or, as it is now styled, San Francisco. And of late, more than ever has he absented himself from his ancestral halls. For the *hacienda* is the house in which he was born; with its surrounding pastures left him by his father, some time deceased.

Since coming into possession he has neglected his patrimony, letting it go to decay, himself giving loose rein to all kinds of evil courses—cards and cock-fighting, wine and women, being the four he specially delights in.

Any one of these would account for the dilapidated look of his dwelling. With the four, no wonder it is well-nigh a ruin.

In his absence, it looks even more like one; for then his domestics having nothing to do, are scarce ever seen outside to give the place an appearance of life. Fond of cards, as himself, they may at such times be found squatted upon the pavement of the

inner court, playing *monte* on a spread *serape*, with *clucos* staked upon the *albur*.

When their master is at home things are a little different. For Don Faustino, with all his dissipation, is anything but an indulgent "dueno." Then his domestics have to move about and wait upon him with assiduity. If they don't, they will hear *caraños* and get kicks from his boot, or cuts from his riding-whip.

It is the morning after that night when the *monte* bank suspended play and pay, the time being six o'clock, A. M.

Notwithstanding the early hour, the domestics are stirring about the place as if they had something to do, and were doing it. To one acquainted with their usual habits, the brisk movements will be interpreted as a sure sign that their master is at home. Correctly interpreted, for he is.

He has been there for a very short time, only a few minutes. Absent for over a week, he has this morning made his appearance a little before day-dawn.

He has not returned alone. Along with him is one whom all his servants know; his friend and constant companion, Don Francisco de Lara.

They have ridden up to the house, dropped the bridles on the necks of their horses; and, without saying word, left them to the care of grooms rudely roused from their slumber.

The house-servants, opening the great door of the *aquana*, see that the *dueno* is in ill-humor; which stirs them into activity, as if a hot poker were applied to their heels.

In haste they prepare the repast called for—a *desayuna* of chocolate and *tortillas*.

Entering the *sala de comer*, and seating themselves at the table, the two men await its preparation.

For a while there is silence; each with an elbow rested on the table, a hand supporting his head, and fingers twisted into the hair.

The silence is soon broken; the host, as it should be, speaking first.

"How had we best act, De Lara? I don't think it will be safe staying here. After what's happened they're sure to be after us."

"That's probable enough. *Cuapita!* I'm puzzled to make out how these fellows could have known we were there. 'Crusaders' they said, which means they were sailors belonging to the war-ship, as no doubt they were—the boat's crew that was waiting. But what brought them up, and how came they to arrive just then and there? Above all, how did they get hold of our names? The devil's own mystery to me!"

"To me, as well."

"There were no sailors hanging about the hotel when we left it; and we saw none as we came through the streets. Besides, if we had, how could they have come up from the opposite side without passing us the other way? *Currambo!* it's enough to make one believe in second sights!"

"That seems the only way to explain it."

"Yes; but it won't. I've been thinking of another explanation, more conformable to the laws of nature."

"What?"

"That there's been somebody under that old skiff. We stood talking there like four fools, calling out one another's names. Now, suppose one of those sailors was waiting there as we came along, and, seeing us, crept under the boat? He could have heard everything we said, and, stealing off after we crossed over to the wall, would bring up the rest of the crew. Barely probable, I admit. Still it's possible, and more likely than anything else I can guess at."

"It is; and now I think of it, while we were standing under the wall, I fancied I saw something like the shadow of a man gliding along the beach, as if going away from the boat."

"You did?"

"I'm almost certain I did. At the time I thought nothing about it, as we were watching for the others; and I had no suspicion of any one else being there. I believe there must have been."

"I believe so, too; and *per Dios!* that accounts for everything. I see it all. That's how they got our names, and know all about us. We're in a scrape, sure. Great heavens! why did you not tell us you saw a man?"

"Because, as I've said, I wasn't thinking of any one being there—at least who had anything to do with them. Who would?"

"Well, your thoughtlessness has got us into an infernal fix—the worst I've been in, and I can remember more than one. No use to think about dueling now, whoever might be challenger. Instead of seconds they'd meet us with a *ponse* of sheriff's officers. Likely enough they'll be setting them after us. Although I feel sure our bullets didn't hit either, it'll be just as bad. The attempt will tell against us all the same. Therefore, it won't do to stay here; so tell your fellows not to unsaddle. We'll need to be off soon as we've swallowed the chocolate."

A shout from Don Faustino brings one of his domestics to the door; and a word or two sends him to give the order for keeping the horses in hand.

"*Chingura!*" fiercely exclaims the gambler, striking the table with his fist. "We've had the devil's own luck. Everything gone against us."

"Everything, indeed. Our money lost, our love, our vengeance."

"No, not the last! Have no fear of that, Faustino. It's still to come."

"How?"

"How! You ask that, do you?"

"I do. I can't see what way we can get vengeance now. You know the *guardia-marinas* will be gone. Their ship is to sail soon. Last night there was talk in the town that she might leave at any moment to-morrow, or even to-day."

"Let her go, and them with her. The sooner the better for us. That won't hinder us from getting revenge. On the contrary, it'll help us. Ha! we shall strike them in their tenderest part!"

"How can we when they've gone?"

"Faustino Calderon, I won't call you a fool, notwithstanding your behavior last night. But you ask some very silly questions; and that's one of them. Supposing these *gringos* to be gone, does it follow they'll take everything along with them? Can you think of nothing they're leaving behind?"

"Their hearts, I suppose, you mean?"

"No, I don't."

"What then?"
 "Their sweetheart's, stupid."
 "But they're going, too."
 "So you say and so it may be. But not before another event takes place—one that may embarrass—perhaps delay their departure."
 "Amigo, you talk enigmatically. Will you oblige me by speaking a little plainer?"
 "I will; but wait till we've had our chocolate and after it a glass of Catalan. I need a little alcohol to get my brain in working order, for there's work for it to do. Enough now to tell you that I've had a revelation. A good angel, or it may be a devil, has visited me and given it. A vision that shows me at the same time riches and revenge, pointing straight to both."
 "Has this vision shown that I'm to be a sharer?"
 "It has; and you shall be. But only in proportion as you shall prove yourself worthy."
 "Currambo! I'll do my best. I have the will, if you'll instruct me in the way."
 "I'll do all that. But, I warn you, it'll need more than will—strength, secrecy, determination—"
 "A *qui esta senores*."
 The conversation is interrupted by the servant bringing in the "desayuna."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN HYPOTHECATED HOUSE.

A FEW moments suffice for the light matutinal repast.
 After which a decanter of Catalonian brandy and glasses are brought upon the table, with a bundle of Manila cigars, size No. 1.
 While the glasses are being filled, and the cigars lighted, there is silence.
 Then the host of the house calls upon his guest to impart the particulars of that visionary revelation, which promises to make both rich, at the same time giving them revenge.
 Taking a gulp from his glass, and a puff or two at his cigar, De Lara responds to the call.
 Leaning across the table and looking his confederate in the face, he just asks:
 "Are you a bankrupt, Faustino Calderon?"
 "You know I am, Francisco De Lara. Why do you put the question?"
 "Because I want to be sure, before making known to you the scheme I've hinted at. As I've told you, I'm after no child's play. I ask you again, are you a bankrupt?"
 "And I answer you, I am. But what has that to do with it?"
 "A good deal. Never mind. You are one? You assure me of it?"
 "I do. I'm as poor as yourself, if not poorer, after last night's losses. I'd embarked all my money in the *monte* concern."
 "But you have something besides money—this house and your land?"
 "Mortgaged months ago—up to the eyes, the ears, the crown of the head. That's where the cash came from to set up the bank that's broken, breaking me along with it."
 "And you've nothing left—no chance for starting it again?"
 "Not a *clavo*. Here I am apparently in my own house, with servants, such as they are, around me. It's all in appearance. In reality I'm not the owner. I once was, as my dead father before me; but can't claim to be any longer. Even while we are here, drinking this Catalan, the mortgagee—that old usurer, Martinez—may step in and kick us out."
 "Curajo! I'd like him to try. He'd catch the devil if he attempted to kick me out, or anybody else, just now in my present humor. There's more fear of our being pulled out. And for that reason we haven't much time to stay talking. Let's come to the point at once—back to where we left off. On your oath, Faustino Calderon, you're no longer a man of money?"
 "On my oath, Francisco De Lara, I haven't an *onza* left—no, not even a *peso*."
 "Enough. Now that I know your financial status, we can understand one another, and without further circumlocution I shall make you a sharer of the bright thought that has flashed across my brain. It will be for you to say whether you wish to take a share in the action to result from it."
 "Let me hear what it is."
 "Not so fast, Faustino. As I've already twice said, it's no child's play. But a business that needs nerve and boldness. Above all, fidelity among those who may engage in it; for more than two will be needed. It wants at least four. I know three who will do. About the fourth I'm not so certain."
 "Who are the three?"
 "Francisco De Lara, Manuel Lozada, and Rafael Rojas."
 "And the fourth, about whom you are dubious?"
 "Faustino Calderon."
 "Why do you doubt me, De Lara?"
 "Don't call it doubting. I only say I'm not certain about you."
 "But for what reason?"
 "Because you may be squeamish or get scared. Not that there's much danger, and there mayn't be any, if the thing's cleverly managed. But there must be no bungling, and above all no backing out—no treason. The last is the only real danger. All the rest will be safe and simple enough."
 "Can't you trust me, so far as to give me a hint of your scheme? As to my being squeamish, I think, De Lara, you do me a wrong. The last forty-eight hours have made some inroads upon my conscience. A man who has lost his all, and suddenly sees himself a beggar, isn't disposed to be very sensitive. Come, *camarado*! Tell me, and try me."
 "I intend doing both, but not now. It is a matter that calls for formalities; among them, some swearing. All who embark in it must be bound by a solemn oath. It will be time enough then for you to know what I'm aiming at. Now, I can only say that, if the scheme succeeds, two things are sure, and both concern yourself, Faustino Calderon."
 "What are they? You can confide that much to me."
 "Certainly, I can, and shall. The first is that you'll be a richer man than you've ever been; at least since I've had the honor of your acquaintance; the second, that Don Gregorio Montijo will not leave California, at least not quite so soon, nor altogether in the way he is wishing. You may have plenty of

time yet, and opportunities as well, to press your suit with Inez Alvarez."
 "Currambo! Secure me that, and I swear—"
 "You needn't set about swearing just yet. You can do that when it comes to the occasion. Till then I can take your word. With one in love, as you believe yourself, that should be binding as any oath; especially when it promises such a rich reward."
 "You're sure about Lozada and Rojas?"
 "Quite so. With them there won't be need for any prolonged conference. When a man sees the chance of getting sixty thousand dollars, in a lump sum, right down in gold-dust, he'll be pretty sure to act promptly, and won't be particular as to the means by which it's to be obtained."
 "Sixty thousand dollars! That to be the share of each?"
 "That and more, maybe."
 "Why, it makes one mad to think of such a sum."
 "Don't go mad till you've got it. Then you may."
 "If I do, 'twill be with joy."
 "Well, it won't be with grief; not likely, since it will give you a fresh lease of sweet life, and renew your hopes of having Inez. *Vamonos!* we must get away from here, for two reasons: First, because we're in danger of being taken away by some one coming for us. Though, after all, there's nothing to apprehend yet. The *gringos* must have gone aboard their ship, and are not likely to be ashore again before breakfast. They were both well sprung with champagne, and it will take them some time to rub the gout out of their eyes, after waking up. Besides, there'd be all the business in town, looking up warrants, and the like. They do such things rather slowly in San Francisco. Then there's the ten miles out here. No; we needn't be in a hurry, so far as that goes. But the other's a thing that won't keep, and we must at once set about it. Fortunately the road that takes us to a place of concealment is the same we'll have to travel upon business. We must get to the ranch of Rocas, where we'll be sure to find Lozada. The two are hardly apart. We'll be safer there than anywhere else I can think of. We may stay with old Rafael, till this ugly wind blows by. In a week, it'll be all over. If not, we must keep out of sight a little longer, or leave San Francisco for good."
 "I hope we'll not be forced to that. I shouldn't at all like it."
 "Like it or not, you may have to lump it. What does it signify where a man lives, so long as he's got sixty thousand dollars in his pocket?"
 "True; that ought to make any place pleasant."
 "Well, you'll have that; but not if we stay palavering here. Let us be gone!"
 A shout from Calderon summons a *muchacho*, who is directed to order round the horses.
 These soon appear in front, under the guidance of the ragged groom; who, after delivering them to their masters, see the latter mount and ride off, they know not whither. Neither do they care, so long as they are themselves left to idleness, with *frijoles*, *tortillas*, *tacajo*, and *monte*.
 Soon they too disappear inside the *patio*, and the hypotheated house resumes its wonted look of desolation.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE LAST LOOK.

"Up anchor!"
 The order rings along the decks of the Crusader, and the watch stand by the windlass to execute it. It is the day succeeding that spent by Crozier and Cadwallader ashore. These, turning out of their cots to attend to duty, are surprised at hearing that the ship is to sail at noon.
 Others aboard share their surprise—all who have not heard the reason for such hasty departure. They were expecting it, but not that day.
 It soon becomes known in the quarter, and thence spreads over the ship. A corvette coming in the evening before has brought dispatches from the flag-ship of the Pacific squadron. Among them orders for the Crusader to set sail for the Sandwich Islands, without an hour's delay. Some question with King Kamekameha.
 The corvette is to replace the frigate on the San Francisco station; for the Crusader is a frigate.
 The dispatch-bearer has also brought a mail; and the Crusader's officers get letters; some of the sailors as well; home news welcome to those who have been long away from their native land. For the ship has been three years cruising in the South seas.
 Something more than news several officers receive. In large envelopes addressed to them are inclosed documents bearing an official seal. Commissions giving them promotion.
 Among the rest one reaches Crozier, advancing him a step in rank. His ability as an officer has been reported at head-quarters, as also his gallant conduct in rescuing a sailor from drowning—Harry Blow. In all probability the latter deed has led to his promotion; but whatever the cause, he is leaving San Francisco a lieutenant.
 Such a high grade at his age should make him happy—even joyful.
 He is neither one nor the other. On the contrary, as the sails are spread and the frigate stands out of the harbor, there is a cloud upon his brow that speaks of unpleasant recollections.
 Nor has it passed away as, running through the straits of the Golden Gate, the wide bright ocean opens to his view.
 He is not the only officer on the Crusader whose countenance is thus shadowed. Beside him is one who seems to suffer as himself—one rarely otherwise than cheerful. It is his friend, Cadwallader.
 More reason has Willie to be woeful, for the corvette has brought no promotion for him, and he still remains a "midshipmite."
 It is not that which is making him low-spirited.
 What then? The thought of parting with his sweetheart—now *fiancee*?
 Nor can it be this. He bade adieu to her the day before, and laughed at leaving her. No need for being sad after those sweet sworn vows of fidelity, coupled with the certainty of soon seeing her again.
 Why should he be so? And why the new-made lieutenant chagrin, as to all appearance he does? Is it at being deprived of the chance to fight a duel,

and fear of disgrace for not being on the spot to receive the expected challenges?
 No more of that now. The latest episode of last night has wiped out all scores that might have required settling according to the code of honor. Known assassins are not likely to show themselves as challengers; and if their intended victims give a thought to them, it is only regret at not having an opportunity of bringing them to justice.
 Why, then, are the young officers low-spirited, distraught?
 The answer can be had by listening to their conversation; as they stand in the ship's stern, looking their last upon a land that for a time must be dear to them.
 It is after the Crusader has cleared the Golden Gate, and is running under the lee of the Farallones.
 Their eyes are upon a hill fast sinking into the sea; its summit a spot sacred to both as the place of their birth. It is that, standing on which but the day before they felt as if in heaven.
 Why do they not feel joy in again beholding it?
 Crozier gives the answer in a speech of twenty words, or rather a soliloquy uttered aloud.
 "Carmen Montijo! to think a common gambler should be acquainted with her—presume to speak with—to love her—oh, God!"
 "Worse than gamblers," adds Cadwallader, equally concerned in the subject of the soliloquy; "assassins if they'd had success."
 "Everything that's vile and vulgar. Don't it make you mad to think of it, Will? It does me."
 "Well, not mad; that's not the feeling I have. I'm only afraid—"
 "Afraid! of what?"
 "That the fellows may do some harm to our girls. As we know now, the scoundrels may be up to anything. Since they don't stick at assassination, they won't at abduction. I hope your letter to Don Gregorio will open his eyes about them, and put him on his guard. My dear Inez—who's to protect her? I'd give all I've got to have seen her safe into that ship. There we may feel sure that Harry Blow will take care of them both."
 Cadwallader's words seem greatly to affect his companion, changing the expression upon his countenance. It is still shadowed, but the cloud shows a different meaning. It was before chagrin, anger, or some passion akin; it is now more of anxiety.
 "You've struck a chord, Cad, that gives me pain. I hadn't thought of that, and it mightn't have occurred to me. My mind has been all occupied with the other thing—you understand?"
 "I do, Ned. At the same time, I think you make too much of the other thing, as you call it. I confess it troubled me at first, though not a very great deal; now it don't at all. On reflection, there's nothing to be bothered about. They say it's a common thing among Spanish Americans, where customs are altogether unlike our own, to have professional gamblers going into the best society. Besides, I can tell you what may comfort you a little—a bit of information I got from Inez, as we were *platicando* along the road. It was natural something should be said about Sky-Blue, and my sticking his horse in the hip."
 "What did she say about him?" asks Crozier, with evident interest.
 "That he was a gentleman by birth, but falling fast, and now quite fallen."
 "And De Lara—did she speak of him?"
 "She did, still more disparagingly, though of him she knew less. She only said that he had been introduced to her grandfather and the family, and was accustomed to meet them on occasions. Of late they had learnt more of him, and learning this, her aunt—your Carmen—very much desired to cut the acquaintance. They intended doing it even if they had remained in California. Now that they were leaving, there would be the less difficulty."
 Crozier, with eyes earnestly bent upon the speaker, has listened to the explanation. At its close he cries out, grasping Cadwallader by the hand:
 "Will! you've lifted a load from my heart. I can now look at the summit of yonder hill with pleasure, and feel the truth and power of Campbell's splendid lines:
 "A kiss can consecrate the ground
 Where mated hearts are mutual bound;
 The spot, where love's first links are wound,
 That ne'er are riven,
 Is hallowed down to earth's profound,
 And up to heaven."
 After repeating the passionate words, he stands gazing on the spot so consecrated to him.
 Cadwallader's eyes, with equal interest, are turned in the same direction.
 For a time both are silent, absorbed in sweet thoughts.
 Only when the land looms low along the horizon, and the crest of the Coast Range appears but the outline of a cloud, does the shadow return to their faces.
 Then on Crozier's, as already on that of Cadwallader: it is not anger—not the rancor of jealousy—but fear for those left behind.
 The only relief to it is their reliance on the brave Harry Blow. In him is their hope.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A SOLEMN COMPACT.

A COTTAGE of the old Californian kind—in other words, a *ranchito*.
 One of the rudest of these humble dwellings—the homes of the Spanish-American poor.
 It is a mere mud hut, thatched with a sort of sea-shore grass, the "broom-bent" seen growing on some sand dunes near by. For it is beside the sea, within sight of it, itself unobscured by reason of rocks that cluster around and soar up behind, forming a rugged background, in keeping with the aspect of the dwelling.
 From the land side it is only approachable by devious and difficult paths known to a few intimate friends of the owner.
 From the sea equally difficult. A little cove leading up to it has not depth enough to admit the entrance of a boat; but for a stream trickling seaward, that has furrowed out a tiny channel in the strand.
 That through this a boat can enter the little bay, is evident from the fact of one seen moored near its bottom, in front of, and not far from the hovel. It is a craft of the kind generally used by Califor-

nian fishermen, more especially those who pursue the fur-seal. Hence it may be deduced that the owner of both hut and boat is a seal-hunter.

This is his profession reputedly, though there are some who ascribe to him a calling of a different kind, insinuating that he occasionally does business as a *contrabandista*.

It may not be true, though Rafael Roca—for he is the man—would not take much trouble to deny it. He would scarce consider it an aspersion on his character. Indeed, under Old Californian administration, it would be but slight blame or shame to him. Not such a great deal, either, under the new, and, perhaps, even less. Compared with the crimes daily committed in San Francisco, the cailing of the smuggler would seem almost an honest one.

But the seal-hunter has a reputation for doings of a still darker kind. To those slightly acquainted with him it is only suspicion, but a few of his more intimate friends can say for certainty that he is not disinclined now and then to do a stroke either of road-robbery or house-breaking. So that if times have changed for the worse, the conduct of Rafael Roca has not needed any change to keep pace with them.

He is in his hut, not alone, but in the company of three men—in personal appearance altogether unlike himself.

He wears the coarse, common habiliments of a fisherman, while they are attired in costly stuffs—cloth and silk-velvet, lashed with gold lace, and gleaming with constellations of buttons.

Notwithstanding their shining magnificence, Rafael Roca does not appear to cover before his guests. On the contrary, he is seated side by side with them, at the same table—the only one his cottage contains—discussing some question; by his tone and features showing himself their equal, or feeling so.

Two of the three individuals thus strangely consorting, are already well-known to the reader, the third but slightly. The two are Francisco De Lara, and Faustino Calderon. The other is Don Manuel Lozada, famed for his fighting-cocks.

The first have just entered under Roca's roof; the cock-fighter has been found there, as De Lara predicted.

After welcoming his newly-arrived guests, in Spanish-American fashion, saying to them, "*Mia casa a la disposicion de ustedes*," the seal-hunter has invited them to be seated, and placed before them a bottle of his best—this being *aguardiente*.

Some conversation of a general kind has passed, and they are now entering on a subject more interesting and particular. The key-note has been struck by De Lara; the others seeing something in his eye, have been expecting him to do so.

He opens by asking a question. "*Cavalleros! do you want to become rich?*"

All three respond with a laugh, simultaneously exclaiming, "*Síntissim!*"

Lozada adds:

"In my time I've heard many an idle interrogatory; but never one as superfluous as that—not even when there's twenty to one offered against a staggering cock."

Roca asks:

"What do you call rich, Señor Don Francisco?"

"Well, to be worth sixty thousand dollars. I suppose you'd consider that sufficient to give the title?"

"Yes, indeed. Not only the title, but the substantial reality. If I'd only the fifth part of it I'd give up chasing seals, to say nothing of certain industries more profitable."

"And I cock-fighting; that is, to make my living by it, though I might still like a main for the pastime of the thing. With sixty thousand dollars at my back, I'd go for something better in the way of business."

"Well, gentlemen," says De Lara, puffing vigorously at his cigar, evidently determined to beat about no longer, but at once come to business, "I can promise each of you the sum I speak of; that at least, if you're willing to go in with me. I want your assistance in a little affair I have on hand. Are you the men to give it?"

"Your second question is more sensible than your first, though equally superfluous; at least, so far as concerns me. I'm the man to do anything that'll get me sixty thousand dollars—any mortal thing."

It is Lozada who thus unconditionally declares himself.

The seal-hunter indorses it by a declaration of like daring, and similar sentiment.

Calderon does not speak; he is supposed to be already acquainted with De Lara's design.

"Now, Don Francisco, let's know what you're driving at," says Lozada and Roca in a breath, the former continuing:

"Have you struck a *veta*, or stumbled on a rich placer? If so, we're ready for either rock-mining or pan-washing, so long as the labor's not too hard. Speak out and tell us what it is. The thought of clutching sixty thousand *pesos* makes a man impatient."

"Well, I'll tell you so far, that it is a *veta*, a mine of gold, and one that don't need any rock-crushing or mud-crading. The gold is already gathered; it lies in a certain place, all in a heap, waiting transport to some other place to be selected by ourselves."

"Your words sound well," says Lozada.

"Good—wonderful," exclaims Roca.

"They're true as good; no exaggeration in them, I assure you. The gold only wants taking."

"First getting at, I suppose; will this be easy?"

"Easy enough to those who know how and are determined. I ask you again, are you the men to go in for it?"

"I'm one," answers Lozada.

"And I another," assents Roca.

"I'm not going to fail you," puts in Calderon, glancing sympathetically toward the questioner.

"Enough!" says De Lara; "enough as a preliminary, but not for a complete contract of partnership. Before entering into that, there must be something more. Are you all ready to swear there shall be truth between us—fidelity to the death?"

"I am."

"I also."

"And I."

"Bueno! now let us take the oath first. After it I'll tell you what it's for. Let every man lay his stiletto upon the table."

They answer by each drawing his dagger—a

weapon carried by every Spanish-Californian—and depositing them as directed.

De Lara puts down his own, and then arranges the four in the form of a quadrilateral cross—Maltese fashion.

This done, he stands erect on one side of the table, Lozada opposite, Roca and Calderon on either flank. De Lara repeats in solemn strain, the others saying after him:

"In the deed we this day agree to do acting together and jointly, we swear to be true to each other; to stand by each other if need be to the death; to keep what is done a secret from all the world, and if any one betray it, we, the other three, swear to follow him wherever he may flee, and take vengeance upon him by taking his life. If any of us fail in this oath, may we be forever unfortunate in this world, and cursed in the world to come. We swear!"

At the close of the terrible adjuration, all four make the sign of the cross, stooping down and kissing the symbol of it spread before them on the table.

A *capita* of *aguardiente* is a fit finale to the blasphemous ceremony, which quaffed, they take up the stiletto, replace them in their sheaths, and again listen to De Lara, to learn the nature of the compact to which they have so solemnly bound themselves.

He soon makes it known, the disclosure requiring only a few words. It is but a bit of burglary—three hundred thousand dollars in gold-dust lying in a lone country house, without any other protection than that of its owner, a feeble old man, and half a dozen Indian domestics.

There can be no great risk in the deed, nor need much time intervene before doing it. A day or two to provide the necessary implements, and get up the disguises; part of another to reach the place, for it is thirty miles distant from the ranch of Roca.

After taking counsel upon their scheme, and debating about the time, De Lara summarizes the last by saying:

"Three days hence we shall be seated around this table, not as now with empty pockets, but each having sixty thousand dollars in his lap."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ON BOARD THE CONDOR.

HARRY BLEW has not gone away with the Crusader.

He could have done so, by full consent of her officers, and to the great satisfaction of her crew. Only two of the former would have been likely to object—these Crozier and Cadwallader.

He does not give them cause, but will keep his promise made at the Sailor's Home. It was renewed after getting aboard ship and giving an account of his zigzag roving that led to his being able to render them assistance.

Up by the earliest bells of the morning watch, he makes request for a boat to set him on the beach.

Which the lieutenant of the watch grants, giving him the dingy. No officer on the frigate would refuse Harry Blew.

He leaves the ship, and is rowed ashore; landing on the wooden wharf with lighter heart than when he ran along it in quest of Crusaders.

But with heavier purse, since two hundred dollars, a gift from Crozier, are in the pockets of his peajacket.

With this he might proceed at once to the Sailor's Home, and clear his pledged *impedimenta*. But he does not go there direct. Instead, he once more sets off in search of Don Tomas Silvestre.

The ship-agent chances to be an early riser, and is in his office.

Harry presents the card given him by Crozier, at the same time telling his story.

In return he gets directions from Don Tomas to report himself aboard the Chilean ship, El Condor, accompanied by a note addressed to her captain.

He is told that the latter is soon to be ashore; and by waiting he will see him at the office.

But Harry Blew will not wait. He remembers the old adage, "first come first served;" and, applying it to himself, determines as soon as possible to present himself on the Condor.

He has made up his mind to be her first mate—if he can. It is not mere ambition—not all of it. Something whispers him that in this capacity he may be of more service to his friend and patron; more capable of protecting the fair creatures committed to his charge.

The watermen of San Francisco harbor do not ply their oars gratuitously. Even the shabbiest of shore boats hired for the shortest time demands a stiffish fare. It will cost Harry Blew a couple of dollars to be set aboard the ship, though she is lying scarce three cables' length from the shore.

What cares he for that? It is nothing now.

Hailing the nearest skiff, he points to the Condor, saying:

"Heave along, lads! and put me aboard yonder craft—that 'un as shows a bit o' tri-color buntin' w' a single star in the blue. The sooner ye do yer job the better ye'll get paid for it."

A contract of this kind, *carte blanche*, is usually entered into with alacrity, and with celerity carried out. It is thus between the boatmen and Harry Blew. In ten minutes he speeds up the man-ropes of the Condor, and drops down on her main deck.

He looks around, but sees no one—at least nothing in the style of a sailor. Only an old negro, with skin black as a boot, and crow-footed all over the face. Beside him two other creatures in semi-human shape, but covered with fox-colored hair—the pets of Captain Lautanas.

Harry Blew stands surprised; for a time doubting to which of the three he ought to address himself. In point of apparent intelligence there is not much to choose. However, he with the sable cuticle cuts short his hesitation by coming forward, and saying:

"Well, Massa Sailorman! wha' you come fo'?"

"S'pose you want see de capen? I see only de cook."

"Oh! you're only the cook, are you? Well, old caboose, you've made a correct guess 'bout my bizness. It's the capt'in I want to see."

"All right. He down in de cabin. You wait hya, I fotch 'im up less'n no time."

The old darky shuffles off aft, and down the cabin stairs, leaving Harry in the company of the

two monstrous-looking creatures, whom he has now made out to be *ourang-outangs*.

"Well, mates!" says he, addressing them in a jocular manner, "what be your opinion o' things in general? Do ye think the wind's goin' to stay sou'-westerly or shift roun' to the nor'-east?"

"Cro—cro—crok."

"Oh, hang it, no. I ain't o' the croakin' sort. Hain't ye got nothin' more sensible than than to say?"

"Kurra—kurra—kurra—cro—cro—crok."

"No, I won't do any think o' the kind; leastways unless there turns out to be short commons on the ship. Say, old boys, how 'bout the grog? Regular allowance, I hope; three times a day?"

"Na—na—na—na—na—boof! ta—ta—ta—fuff."

"No! only two, ye say? Then I will croak, an' sommat loud, too. For ye see, shipmates—I s'pose I shall be callin' ye so—'board the old Crusader I've been accustomed to have my rum reg'lar, three times the day; an' if it ain't the same on this vessel—in which I'm 'bout to take service—shiver my spars! if I don't raise sich a rumpus as—"

"Kurra—kurra—cr—cro—crok—Na—na—na—boof—ta—ta—pf—pf—pif!"

The sailor's voice is drowned by the jabbering of the ourangs, his gesture of mock menace, with the semi-serious look accompanying it, having part frightened, part angered them.

The fracas continues until the darky reappears on deck, followed by the skipper.

The cook takes charge of the *quadramana*, conducting them toward his caboose; while Captain Lautanas addresses himself to the sailor:

"Un marinero?" (A seaman?)

"Sí, capitan." (Yes, captain.)

"Que negocio tienes V. conmigo?" (What is your business with me?)

"Well, capt'in," responds Harry, still speaking the language of the Chilean, in understandable *patois*, "I've come to offer my services to ye. I've brought this bit o' paper from Master Silvestre. Maybe it'll explain things better'n I can."

The captain takes the note handed to him, and breaks open the envelope.

A smile irradiates his sallow face as he becomes acquainted with its contents.

At last a sailor! for this is the first who has shown himself.

And a good one, too, as he can tell by a glance. But he has other assurances in the letter of Silvestre; for late the night before the ship-agent has had a communication from Don Gregorio, advising him of the application he might expect; further informing him of what he has himself learned concerning the man—that he is an able seaman, thoroughly trustworthy, and, if need be, competent to act as mate.

With Crozier's indorsement thus vicariously conveyed, Harry Blew has no need to say a word for himself. Nor does Captain Lautanas call for it. He only puts some professional questions, less formally, than as a matter of form.

"The Señor Silvestre informs me that you are an able seaman and skilled. Can you keep log, and take lunar?"

"Well, capt'in, I've squinted across a quadrant afore now, but won't say I'm up to loonars. Solars, I can do *them*; an' if there's a good chronometer aboard, I wouldn't let a ship run very far out o' her reckonin'. As to keepin' a log, I've 'arnt to write, so as 't might be read; tho' my fist ain't much to brag o'."

"That will do," rejoins the skipper, contentedly.

"Now, Señor Henrique—I see that's your name—answer me in all candor, do you think you are capable of acting as *piloto primero*?"

"First mate, you mean?"

"Yes, that is 'piloto' in Spanish."

"Well, capt'in, 'taint for me to talk big o' myself, but I've been over thirty years 'board men-o'-war; an' ef I warn't able to go mate in a merchanter, I oughter be condemned to cook's scullion for the rest o' my days. If your honor thinks me worthy o' bein' made first officer o' your ship, I'll answer for it she won't stray far out o' her coorse whiles my watch air on."

"Enough, Señor Henrique—Bob-b-l-bolu, lyou—what is it?" asks the Chilean, reopening the note, and vainly endeavoring to pronounce the Saxon surname.

"Blew, Harry Blew."

"Ah, Blew—*azul* esta?"

"No, capt'in. Not that sort o' blue. In Spanish my name have a different significashun. It means as we say o' a gale after it's blowed past—it 'blew.' When it's been a big, 'un, we say it 'blew great guns.'"

"Oh, I understand you. And now, to come to an understanding about the other matter, I'm willing to take you as my first, if you don't object to the wages. I offer fifty *pesos* per month, everything found."

"I'm agreeable to the terms."

"Bueno! When will it be convenient for you to enter on your duties?"

"For that matter, this minute. I only need to go for my kit. When that's stowed, I'll be ready to tackle on to the ropes."

"Well, you can take my cockle-shell ashore; and if you see any sailors that want to join, I authorize you to engage them at double the usual wages. I want to get away as soon as a crew can be shipped. But when you come back, we'll talk more about it. Hasta luego!"

So saying, the Chilean skipper turns back to his cabin, leaving the newly-engaged mate to attend to his own affairs.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE DINGY.

THE first officer of the Condor, now provided with a boat of his own, waves off the skiff that has been waiting; he thus saves a fare, and more economically sculls himself back ashore.

Soon as setting foot on land, he proceeds to the Sailor's Home, takes his *paraphernalia* out of pawn, and fetches them away on a truck, hired for their transportation.

But not before giving the surly barkeeper a bit of his mind, and with some added ejaculations addressed to the inhospitable Boniface.

In accordance with the injunctions of Captain

Lautanas, he stays a little longer in the town trying to pick up sailors.

Plenty of these sauntering through the streets, and lounging at the doors of drinking-saloons. But even double wages will not tempt them to abandon their free and easy life, and the Condor's mate comes to the conclusion that he must return to the ship *salus*.

Assisted by the truckman, he gets his traps into the little boat, which is about to shove off from the beach, when he chances to look toward the Crusader.

There he sees what gives him a surprise—the frigate has out signals for sailing!

He wonders at this; there was no word of it when he was aboard. He knew, as all the others, that she was to sail soon; in a day or two, but not at the signal indicated, within the hour.

While gazing at it and conjecturing the cause of such hasty departure, he observes a boat putting off from the ship's side. It is a small thing, and he can tell it to be the dingy, the same that set him ashore in the morning.

He perceives that it is making for the pier, and must come past the place where his own tiny craft is still at rest, keel upon the sand.

Sure to be some one in the dingy who can give an explanation of why the ship is starting off in such a hurry.

Besides, he would like to send a message to Mr. Crozier, making known the result of his application to the agent of the Chilean ship. He longs to let his patron know of the good luck he has had, and intended to have done so *viva voce*, supposing there would be an opportunity before either of the ships should leave the port.

Now it will be impossible; and he must make the communication at second-hand.

The dingy will give him a chance of doing this, and he waits for its coming along.

There are three men in the little boat, two oarsmen, and a third seated in the stern-sheets, tiller in hand.

As they draw near, he recognizes the steersman, whose face is toward him. It is the bright, ruddy countenance of Will Cadwallader.

Soon they are close enough for the midshipman to see and recognize him, which he does, exclaiming, in a tone of joyful surprise:

"By Jove! it's Blew himself. Hallo there, Harry! You're just the man I'm coming ashore to see. Hold starboard oar! Pull in on the port side—way enough!"

In a few seconds the dingy is bow on to the Condor's boat, when Harry takes hold of her stern, and steadies the two together.

"Glad to see ye again, Master Willie. I'd just sighted the Crusader's signal for sailin', and despaired o' havin' the chance to say a last word to yourself and Mr. Crozier."

"Well, old boy; it's about that I've come ashore. Jump out and walk with me a bit along the beach."

The sailor drops his scull and springs out upon the sand, the midshipman preceding him.

When sufficiently distant from the boats to be beyond earshot of the oarsmen, Cadwallader resumes speech:

"Harry, here's a letter from Mr. Crozier; he wants you to deliver at the address you'll find written upon it. To save you the necessity of inquiring, I can point out the place it's to go to. Look along shore! You see the house—yonder, on the top of a hill?"

"Sart'only I see it, Master Willie; and know who lives in it—two o' the sweetest creetur's in all Californy. I s'pose the letter are for one o' them?"

"No it isn't, you dog; for neither of them. Read the superscription; you see it's addressed to a gentleman."

"Oh, it's for the governor himself," rejoins Harry, taking the letter and glancing at the envelope. "All right, sir; I'll put it in the old gentleman's flippers safe an' sure. I s'pose, sir, ye want it to go straight now?"

"Well, soon as you can conveniently take it; though there's not any need for helter-skelter haste. There'll be no time for an answer, anyhow. Before you could get there the Crusader will have weighed anchor, and will be off. I've hurried ashore to see you, and have barely time to get back. It's fortunate my stumbling on you here. I had hoped to find you at the office of the ship-agent, Silvester; and failing that, intended leaving the letter there with a note to yourself. Now I've seen you, I can tell what's wanted. In that letter, Harry, there's something that concerns Mr. Crozier and myself—a matter of great moment to both of us. When you've given it to Don Gregorio, he'll no doubt ask you some questions about the little affair of last night. Tell him all you know, and don't conceal anything, except that you mustn't say that Mr. Crozier and myself had taken too much champagne—you understand, old fellow?"

"Parfitly, Master Will."

"Good. Now, Harry, I haven't another moment to stay. See! the ship's spreading sail! If I don't get to her quick, I may be left here in California all my life, and never rise beyond the rank of midshipman. Oh! by the way; you'll be glad to hear that your friend Mr. Crozier is now a lieutenant; his commission came by the corvette. He desired me to tell you, and I'd nearly forgotten it."

"I am glad," rejoins the sailor, raising the hat from his head and uttering a subdued "huzzah!" "Right glad; and maybe he'll be the same at hearing Harry Blew's been also promoted. I'm now mate o' the Chilean ship, Master Willie. You won't forget to tell him, sir?"

"Certainly not, you dear old salt. I am delighted to hear it myself, and hope some day to see you a full-fledged skipper, commanding your own craft. Now, don't forget the girls. Again good-by, and God bless you!"

A squeeze of hands, with fingers entwined as tight as a reef-knot drawn taut; then relaxed with reluctance, after which the two separate.

The midshipman, jumping into the dingy, is rowed hastily toward the Crusader, while the mate hires the truckman to look after his boat till he comes back to it.

For he had changed his intention of going directly aboard the Condor. There is an errand that must be executed before.

Snug as his new berth promises to be, he would

rather lose it than fail to deliver that letter intrusted to him by Cadwallader.

In ten minutes after he has passed through the town—through the canvas tents scattered on its suburb, and is hastening along the San Jose road, toward the *hacienda* of Don Gregorio Montijo.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IN DREAD OF A DUEL.

ONCE more upon the *azotea*, aunt and niece—Carmen Montijo and Inez Alvarez.

It is the day after their betrothal. Their eyes are upon the ship that holds the men holding their hearts, as the hope of their life's happiness.

They could be happy now, had they full faith in the future.

But there is a cloud overcasting it. Only a speck; yet enough to cause them anxiety. Yesterday, along with its scenes of sweet excitement, had also its incidents of the opposite kind; the recollection of which is not easily got rid of.

The encounter between the gamblers and their lovers can not end with the scene which they themselves witnessed. Something more may be expected to come from it.

What will it be? Assuredly a duel.

However brave before, and boastfully regardless, they dread this now. Circumstances are changed. Then their sweethearts were only suitors; now that they are affianced, as if their own, the relation is different, as also the feeling it engenders. Before, they were not sure of possession; now they have it. To lose them now will be losing them indeed.

Inez is less troubled than her aunt; for she has less reason. With the keen instinct of woman, she has discovered that Calderon is a coward, and has not much apprehension that he will fight.

With instinct equally keen, Carmen knows that De Lara will. After his dire humiliation, he is not the man to shrink out of sight. Ruffian and brave though he be, he has at least courage—perhaps the only quality he possesses deserving admiration. Once, and in a way, she herself admired it, if not him.

Standing on the *azotea* they converse in serious tone, discussing the probabilities of what may arise.

The delirious joy of yester eve—that hour when they sat in their saddles looking over the ocean, and listening to the tender accents of love—is to-day succeeded by depression—almost despondency.

They watch the boats that glide to and fro across the bay, especially those, at intervals, separating from the frigate; in one of them, fearing to recognize the forms of Crozier and Cadwallader. Fearing it; for they know that the midshipmen are not to be ashore again before the sailing of the ship. If they come it can only be on an errand irresistible—a *desafio*. Duty should keep them aboard; but honor may require them to make one more visit to the shore—perhaps never to leave it alive.

Thus gloomily reflect Carmen Montijo and Inez Alvarez, as they stand with eyes bent upon the man-of-war, or wandering over the water between.

If the Spanish señoritas but understood the code of signals, all this misery would be spared them. For on the Crusader's main royal-masthead floats a blue flag with a white square in the center, which says she will soon spread her sails, and glide off out of sight, carrying their *amantes* beyond the danger they are dreading.

They see the Blue Peter, without being able to interpret its signification. They do not even think of or gaze at it, their eyes being busy with the boats passing between ship and shore.

One at length arrests their attention, and fixes it—a small craft that, pulling off from the frigate, is seen steering toward the town.

It passes near enough for them to see that there are three men in it. And with a glass to their eyes, they can make out that one of the three is in the uniform of an officer; who, or of what rank, it is not easy to determine.

But love's glance is keen as its instincts; and by the aid of both, and the opera-glass to back them, Inez feels convinced that he in the boat's stern is Willie Cadwallader. Her aunt is of the same opinion.

It does not alarm them so much as if Crozier was by his side. But he is not; the other two—the oarsmen—being sailors in woolen shirts with wide collars folding far back over their shoulders.

For what purpose the young midshipman is being rowed ashore they cannot guess; surely it is not for the dreaded duel!

If on that errand, Carmen well knows that another midshipman would be with him.

Gradually his boat glides on toward the town, and is at length lost to their view behind some sandhills inshore.

While still in conjecture about the young officer's errand, they perceive a change taking place in the aspect of the war-vessel. The tall, tapering masts, with their network of stays and shrouds, are suddenly half-hidden behind broad disks of canvas. The ship is spreading her sails!

They, too, are surprised at this, not expecting it so soon. With the help of their little glasses they can perceive other movements on the ship—signal-flags going up and down, with boats being hoisted to their davits.

While watching these maneuvers, the two-oared boat again appears shooting out from behind the sandhills, and rowing rapidly back to the frigate. The officer and oarsmen are still in it.

Soon it reaches the great leviathan, where it shows like a tiny spot along her water-line.

It too is lifted aloft; and shortly after, the ship's sails, hanging limp and corrugated, are drawn taut to the tacks and sheeted home.

Then the yards are braced round, and the long black hull becomes shortened as it veers about in obedience to the helm; the wind catches the canvas; bellies it out; and the Crusader with a full crew, and the American flag trailing proudly over her taffrail, stands away from the harbor of San Francisco, leaving many a vessel envious at not being able to follow her example.

CHAPTER XL.

AN UNSATISFACTORY EPISTLE.

WHILE the ladies are outside watching the departure of the war-ship, with something like a feel-

ing of relief, Don Gregorio in a private apartment, that containing his treasure, is pacing to and fro with an air of uneasiness yet unrelieved.

It comes from a different cause, and has nothing to do with the sailing of the Crusader. But a great deal with that of the Condor; since on the latter vessel he intends embarking his *aita*.

He is anxious to get aboard the Chilean ship, away from San Francisco; and every hour increases his anxiety. For almost every hour brings him intelligence of some new act of outlawry occurring in the town or its neighborhood, still further impressing him with the insecurity of his property—even of his life.

Robbers and murderers walk boldly abroad through the streets; not alone, but arm-in-arm with judges who have tried without condemning them! While lesser criminals appear before drinking-bars, hobnobbing with the police who either hold them in arrest, or have just released them after a mock hearing before some magistrate, whose eyes, like Justice herself, have been blinded by dust—the gold-dust of California.

With these rumors of lawlessness running around, and plenty of facts to confirm them, no wonder the *ex-haciendado* feels insecure, and desires to get out of the country as soon as he possibly can.

For a similar reason many others of the old Spanish families purpose leaving, and some have already left. With the proud prejudice of the Latinic race, Anglo-Saxon domination is uncongenial to them, even though it might give a protection superior to that they have hitherto enjoyed. It would do this in due time; but it does not now; and so far the change of rulers is scarce an improvement on the old *regime* of their constantly-recurring revolutions. The *leperos* may stay and prosper; but the *ricos* will do well to get away. At least so think they, and are acting up to the thought. Alta California is fast changing its population, since politically it has ceased to be a province of Spanish-America.

As the Senor Montijo moves about in the midst of his money-bags, cogitating how he may best dispose of them for safety, he is called up to the *azotea*. The girls have summoned him thither to witness the departure of the war-ship.

An event that cannot fail to interest him; and he is soon upon the house-top by their side.

"Rather strange, so abruptly going off!" he remarks, after sighting through one of the glasses. "Our young friends said nothing about it last night."

"I think, father, they could not have known of it themselves," says Carmen.

"I'm sure they couldn't," adds Inez.

"What makes you sure, *nina*?" asks Don Gregorio.

"Well—because—" stammers out the Andalusian, a flush starting into her cheeks, "because they'd have told us. They said they were not going so soon."

"Just so; but you see they are going now—gone. However, I think I can explain it. Silvester told me of another war-ship that came into port yesterday, belonging to their nation. Likely she has brought orders for the Crusader to sail at once. I wish the Condor were doing the same. I shan't sleep soundly till we're safe away from—"

"See, *padre mio*! Is not that a sailor coming this way?"

Carmen's quick eye has fallen upon the figure of a man moving along the shore road in the direction of the house.

"*Si, nina*," responds Don Gregorio, after a glance, "he appears to be one."

"Do you think he's coming here?"

"I shouldn't be surprised. Probably he brings a message from our young friends. It may be the man Don Eduardo told me about."

"That's why somebody came ashore," whispers Inez to her aunt. "I'll get a *billetita*, Carmen; so will you. I knew they wouldn't go away without leaving us one last little word."

The niece imparts no information, for the aunt is surmising the same. She replies by one of those proverbs in which the Spanish tongue is so rich:

"*Silencio! Náy Moros en la costa.*" (Silence! There are Moors on the coast.)

While this bit of by-play is being carried on, Don Gregorio is absorbed in some reflection that hinders him from noticing it.

Meanwhile, the sailor ascends the hill, and is seen entering at the road-gate.

There can now be no uncertainty as to his calling. The blue jacket, broad shirt-collar, round, ribboned hat, and bell-bottomed trousers, are all the unmistakable toggery of a tar.

Advancing up the avenue in a rolling gait, with an occasional tack from side to side, that almost fetches him foul among the manzanitas, he at length reaches the open sweep in front. There he stops, looking up to the roof and saluting those upon it by the removal of his hat, and a jerking motion of the head, intended for a bow.

"*Que quierres V., señor?*" asks Don Gregorio, speaking down.

Harry Blew—for it is he—replies by holding out a letter, at the same time saying:

"Your honor, I've brought this for the master of the house."

"I am he. Go in through the door below. I shall come down to you."

Don Gregorio descends the stone stairway, and meeting the messenger in the inner court, receives from him the letter.

Breaking it open, he reads:

"MUY ESTIMABLE SENOR: Circumstances have arisen that take us away from San Francisco sooner than we expected. The corvette, that came into port yesterday, brought orders for the Crusader to sail at once, though our destination is the same as already known to you—Sandwich Islands. As the ship is about to weigh anchor, I have barely time to write a word for myself and Mr. Cadwallader. We think proper to impart some information that will no doubt surprise you. Yesterday morning we met at your house two gentlemen—as courtesy would then have required us to call them—by name Francisco De Lara, and Faustino Calderon. We encountered them at a late hour of the day, when an occurrence took place that absolved us from either thinking of them as gentlemen, or treating them as such. And still later, after leaving your hospitable roof, we again encountered the same individuals, under circum-

stances showing them to be professional gamblers—one certainly so, the other to all appearance his confederate. He called De Lara we found presiding over a *monte* table, and dealing out the cards!

"A spirit of fun, with perhaps a spice of mischief, led us into the play, and betting largely, we succeeded in breaking the bank. After that, for a time we lost sight of the two caballeros, who claim acquaintance with you. But at a still later hour, when making our way to our boat, we once again encountered them—this time in the character of robbers and assassins! That they did not succeed in either robbing or murdering us, is due to the brave fellow who will bear this letter to you, and who is the sailor of whom I spoke to you. He can tell you the particulars of our last encounter with the Californian gentlemen. You may rely on his truthfulness. I have now no time to say more. Hoping to meet you in Cadiz, please convey parting compliments to the señoritas, in which my friend Cadwallader unites with yours, most faithfully,

"EDWARD CROZIER."

The epistle makes a painful impression on the mind of Don Gregorio. Not that he is much surprised at the information regarding De Lara and Calderon. He has heard sinister reports concerning them—of late so loudly spoken, that he had determined on forbidding them further intercourse with his family. That very day he has been displeased on learning of their ill-timed visit, and now he feels chagrin at something like a reproach hinted in Crozier's letter, which touches his *hidalgo* pride.

Thrusting the epistle into his pocket, he questions the sailor, who tells him every thing in detail.

Before being dismissed, Harry makes the acquaintance of the señoritas, who have descended from the azotea. They assist in dispensing hospitality, loading him with pretty presents, and knick-knacks, to be carried aboard the Condor—where they now know him to belong.

As he is about to depart, they flutter around him, speaking kind words, almost offering him kisses, as if they expected to receive something in return.

For all this, he goes away without leaving them the hoped-for *billetes*.

A pang of disappointment—almost chagrin—shoots through the soul of Carmen Montijo, as the sailor passes out of sight.

Similarly afflicted is Inez Alvarez; both reflecting alike. Still there is a hope that there may have been something for them in that envelope held up before their eyes. It was ample enough to contain other inclosures besides a letter to Don Gregorio. Or if only this, there may be a postscript with special reference to them?

Daughters of Eve, they adroitly approach the subject, and draw Don Gregorio.

Yes, there is something in the letter for them. He reads it, "Parting compliments to the señoritas."

"Parting compliments! Those are strange last words for a lover. Only cold compliments! *Santisima!* What can it mean?"

Thus reflect the two girls, as once more on the azotea their eyes follow the war-ship till she is wafted out of sight.

CHAPTER XLI.

"AMRE LA PUERTA!"

AGAIN the house of Don Gregorio Montijo, three days after the ship *Crusader* has passed out of the Golden Gate.

The hour is midnight, and the night a dark one. For the ocean fog has again rolled shoreward across the peninsula, shrouding San Francisco as in a pall. It extends its curtain over the adjacent country, embracing the house of the *haciendado*.

The inmates seem asleep, as at this hour they should be. There is no light in the windows, and no sound within or around the halls. Not even the barking of a dog, the howling of kine, or the stamping of a stalled horse!

Strange this silence, but it would be stranger if such sounds were heard. For there is not a canine creature about the place, no cattle in the inclosures, nor steeds in the stable. Don Gregorio has disposed of his live stock—got quitted of them altogether, even to the watch-dogs of the dwelling.

The last circumstance may seem favorable to four men who are not far from the house, and gradually drawing nearer to it. For they are approaching by stealth, as their steps and attitudes show. They go crouching and in silence, now and then stopping to take a survey *terram* in front, as they do so exchanging suppressed whispers with one another.

Through the filmy atmosphere their figures look weird-like, all the more from their strange, gesticulations and cautious gliding along. Scrutinized closer and in a clear light they would still present something of this appearance. For although in human shape, and wearing the garb of men, their faces are more like those of demons.

On closer scrutiny it is discovered that they are human countenances, with a covering of crape spread over them—*emancarados*.

Nothing more is needed to prove what they are, and their purpose in approaching Don Gregorio's dwelling. They are robbers—burglars—intending to despoil it.

Without removing their masks it may be guessed who they are—the four conspirators left plotting in the ranch of Rafael Rocas.

They are now carrying out the scheme of plunder originated and proposed by De Lara; since elaborated into readiness for execution.

It looks as if Don Gregorio's gold will never reach Panama, much less get transported to Spain.

And his daughter! What of her, with Francisco De Lara drawing nigh as one of the nocturnal ravagers? His granddaughter as well, Faustino Calderon being another?

One cognizant of the existing relations, and spectator of what is passing now, seeing the crape-covered scoundrels as they steal on toward the house—will deem it certain that this is soon to be doubly despoiled—that its owner is to suffer desolation, not only in fortune, but in that far dearer, his family.

The intended despoilers are approaching from the front, up the avenue, though not on it. They keep along the edge among the *manzanita* bushes. These, with the fog, afford sufficient screen to prevent their being seen from the house, even if sentinels were set upon its *azotea*. But there are none; no eye to see,

no voice to give warning, no watch-dog to wake those slumbering within.

At this last the skulkers feel some surprise. On a large grazing estate it is rare for the baying of the molossian not to be heard sounding throughout the night or at short intervals. Before entering the inclosure they have been lying concealed in a thicket, their horses tied to trees. This for nearly an hour, without bark, yelp, or growl reaching their ears. Nor have they heard sound of human voices. All around the house, and the hill upon which it stands, while shrouded in mist, seems steeped in the stillness of death.

Alas! with *emancarados* for like awe is felt by one of the men, who has had some lingering remnants of remorse, or perhaps rather of fear. The other three are too strong in courage and too hardened in crime to let such weakness come over them.

Arriving at the end of the avenue, and within thirty yards of the dwelling, they stop for a final consultation. Though themselves screened by the *manzanitas*, the house is uncovered to their eyes along its whole facade—the massive walls looming dark through the damp, floating vapor.

All silent as ever, no one stirring, no light from any window, the shutters closed behind the *rajas*, the great front *puerta* as well.

"Now for getting inside. What will be our best way? Who of you can tell that?"

It is De Lara who asks these questions.

"In my opinion," answers Lozada, "we'll do best by climbing up to the *azotea*, and over into the *patio*."

"Where's your ladder?" asks Rocas, in his gruff, blunt way.

"We must find one, or something that will serve instead. There's timber lying about the *corrales*; we can get a climbing pole there."

"And while looking for it, wake up some of the *vagueros*. That won't do."

"Then what do you propose, Rafael?" again interrogates De Lara.

The seal-hunter, supposed to have some experience in burglary, is listened to with attention.

"Walk straight up to the door, knock, and ask to be admitted. In that way we'll get in."

"In that way we'll be more likely never to get in. On the contrary, have a blunderbuss pointed at us, and a shower of bullets come whistling around, some of them jogging into us."

It is Calderon who says this.

"Not the least danger of it," rejoins Rocas.

"Take my word, we'll be let in."

"Why do you think so?" asks De Lara.

"Why? Because we have a claim on the hospitality of the house."

"I don't understand you."

"Well, we've got a good story to tell—simple and to the purpose."

"Still I don't understand. Explain yourself, Rafael."

"Why, don't we come as messengers from the man-of-war you've been telling me about?"

"Ah; now I perceive your drift."

"One or two can so announce ourselves, while the others keep out of sight. We are sent by these *guardia-marinas* on an errand to Don Gregorio, or the señoritas, if you like—something of importance affecting their departure. True, the ship by this may be gone away. We can't tell. But no matter; the story of a message will stand good all the same."

"Rafael Rocas!" exclaims De Lara, "you're a born genius. Instead of being forced to do a little smuggling now and then, you ought to be made *administrador de duanos*. We shall act as you advise. No doubt the door will be opened. When it is one can stay by it in charge of the janitor. He's a sexagenarian, and won't be hard to hold. If he struggle, we must silence him. The other three can go ransacking. You, Calderon, know the room where Don Gregorio keeps his chest. We must make straight for that."

"I say, Francisco," whispers Calderon, in the ear of his gambling confederate, having drawn him aside. "About the *utnas*—you don't intend anything with them?"

"Certainly not—not to-night, nor in this fashion. We shall approach them in gentler guise, and in good time; have no fear of it. When they're without a *peso* in the world, they will be less proud, and may be contented to stay a little longer in California. To-night we have enough on our hands without that. One thing at a time—the money first, themselves afterward."

"But suppose they should recognize us?"

"They can't. Disguised as we are, I defy a man's mother to know him. If they did, then—"

"Then what?"

"No use reflecting what. Don't be so scared, man! If I'd anticipated any chance of its coming to extremes of that kind, I wouldn't be here prepared for only half measures. Perhaps we shan't even wake them up, not one of them, and if we do there's not the slightest danger of our being known. So make your mind easy, and let's get through with it. Rocas and Lozada are impatient; we must rejoin them and proceed to business at once."

The four house-breakers again set their heads together, and after a few whispered words to complete their plan of proceeding, advance toward the door.

Once up to it, they stand close in, concealed by its overshadowing arch.

With the butt of his pistol De Lara knocks.

Rocas, whose voice is unknown to any one who may be within, is to do the talking.

No one answers the knock, and it is repeated.

Louder, and again louder. The sexagenarian sleeps soundly to-night.

Another rat-at-ta with the pistol-butt, followed by the request:

"*Abre la puerta!*"

Then comes a response from within, but not the customary "*¿Quien es?*" nor anything in Spanish. On the contrary, the speech saluting the ears of those who seek admission is in a different tongue, and with tone altogether unlike that of the old *cachero*.

"Who are ye?" asks a voice from inside, while a heavy footstep is heard treading the *saguan*.

Before the startled burglars can shape a reply, the voice continues:

"Curse ye! What d'ye want, wakin' a fellow out o' his sleep at this time o' the night? I've a good mind to give ye a pill out o' my six-shooter."

"What the devil does this mean?" mutters De Lara. "Tell him, Rocas," he adds, in *alto voce*, to the seal-hunter, "tell him we're from the man-of-war with—*Carrai!* I forgot you don't speak English. I must do it myself. He don't know who it is."

Then raising his voice:

"We want to see Don Gregorio. We bring a message from the war-ship—from the midship-men."

"I know nothin' 'bout them. As for Don Gregorio, if you want to git sight on him, ye're a preeshus way wide o' the mark. He ain't hyar any more! He's gi'n possession yesterday an' tuk every-thing o' his'n out the house. I'm only hyar in charge o' the place. Guess ye'll find both the Don and his darters at the Parker. It air the most likeliest place to tree that lot."

Don Gregorio gone! his gold—his girls, only an empty house, in charge of a character who carries a Colt's pistol, and would use it on the slightest provocation! Little use their going inside now—not any, but a good deal of danger. Anything but pleasant medicine a pill from that six-shooter!

"*Carraño!* *Carrai!* *Carraño!* *Chingara!* *Carraño!* *Maldita!*"

Such are the exclamations hissed through the teeth of the disappointed house-breakers, differing in intensity according to the passion of the speaker.

They continue pouring them liberally from their lips, as they turn away from the dismantled dwelling, and retrace their steps toward the rancho of Rafael Rocas.

CHAPTER XLII.

A SCRATCH CREW.

THE *ex-haciendado* has acted wisely in abandoning his country-house and betaking himself to a hotel in the town. For this, as the care-taker said, he has done. The life may not be congenial to the señoritas or himself; still it is safe. For though rough in aspect some of their fellow guests may be, as boisterous in manner, the most sensitive lady need not fear moving through their midst. A word or gesture of insult to her, and twenty pistols would be raised to resent it.

Despite his Spanish pride, with its consequent exclusiveness, the Señor Montijo is contented to sojourn at the hotel during the remainder of his stay in California. It is only to be short—until Captain Lautanas can engage a crew for his ship.

Already Don Gregorio has sent his heavy baggage aboard. This openly in the light of day. But something also ponderous, though of less bulk, he has shipped secretly in the dead hours of the night. The \$300,000 of gold-dust is stored in the lockers of the Condor's cabin, no one knowing of its whereabouts save the Chilean skipper and Silvestre. From Don Gregorio's mind the transfer has removed a load of solicitude.

He is all the more satisfied with what he has done, when, on paying a visit to his house for some ultimate purpose, he learns from the man left in charge what has happened—how he was inquired for. He who answered the door with a Colt's revolver in hand, took occasion to peep through the keyhole, and now tells the former proprietor that they seemed greatly disappointed at not finding him at home; and went off uttering adjurations in Spanish—though holding their parley through the door in a different language.

A message from officers of the man-of-war! and brought by four men who spoke in Spanish!

"Strange, all this!" thinks Don Gregorio, who knows that by this time the ship should be several hundreds of miles at sea! Besides the messengers have not afterward presented themselves at the Parker House, whither they were directed!

What could it mean? The sailor who is now first-mate of the Condor, may know something of it, and he will question him the first time he goes aboard, though he has not much hope of elucidation from that quarter as his suspicions point elsewhere. He can not help in some way connecting the occurrence with De Lara and Calderon. Crozier's letter, coupled with information received from the bearer of it, has thrown such a light on their character, that he can now believe them capable of any thing. After attempting to rob the young officers, and murder them as well, they would not hesitate to serve others the same; and the demand for admission at his house may have been made by these very men, in the company of confederates, with the design of plunder—perhaps something worse.

Thus reflecting, Don Gregorio deems it a happy inspiration that guided to the removal of his household gods; and he is now all the more solicitous to leave a land beset with such dangers.

Daily, almost hourly, he is in communication with the Chilean skipper, either face to face, or through the medium of Don Tomas Silvestre. The agent has instructions to report how things progress.

The difficulty continues about getting a crew for the Condor. Several days have elapsed and still no sailors turn up who are willing to ship for Valparaiso. They are all gone off for the gold-placers—or going. The mate is the only man yet engaged.

"Offer higher wages, Silvestre," says Don Gregorio, every day becoming more impatient. "Engage them at any price."

The ship-agent yields ready assent, and inserts in the "*Diario*" a fresh *ariso* addressed to *marineros*. Triple pay to those who wish service on a well-appointed ship. In addition all the usual allowances, the best of everything.

Surely this should get the Condor a crew?

It does. Within twenty-four hours after the advertisement has appeared, sailors begin to show on the ship. They come singly, also in twos and threes, till as many as half a score have presented themselves.

They belong to different nationalities, among them English, French and German. Several appear to be Spaniards or Spanish-Americans, as might be expected from the Condor having been advertised as a Chilean vessel.

Among them there is the usual variety of facial expression; though in one thing a wonderful uniformity. Scarce a man of them but has a countenance in some way unprepossessing—either naturally of sinister cast, or brought to it by a career of sinfulness.

On most there are traces of recent dissipation, in eyes bleary and bloodshot. Of strife, too, in other eyes that are blackened; with scars upon cheeks not yet cicatrized. Some are still in a state of inebriety, and stagger as they step aboard.

Under any other circumstances such sailors would stand no chance of getting shipped. As it is, they are accepted—not one refused.

Captain Lautanas has no choice, and he knows it. Without them he is helpless—hopeless for him to think of putting to sea. If he does not take them, the Condor may swing idly at her anchor for weeks, it may be months.

Quick as they come aboard he enters their names on the ship's books, and assigns them separate bunks in the fore-peak.

He is comforted with the reflection that not all appear addicted to drink. A few have an aspect of sobriety, presenting otherwise a respectable appearance. Under this category most of those who speak Spanish, and have shipped under Spanish names. Among the many backslidings alleged against this nation, habitual drunkenness cannot be counted. At least four of the new sailors, however otherwise ill favored, look as if they would keep sober; and one, by name Padilla, shows credentials that procure for him the birth of *piloto segundo* (second mate).

After the half have been shipped no more present themselves. Even the big bounty offered does not tempt another tar out of the streets of San Francisco. In any other seaport it would empty every sailor's boarding-house to the last lodger.

Ten hands are not enough to work the good ship Condor. Her captain knows it and waits another day, wishing for five more to complete her complement.

He wishes in vain. No more present themselves on the ship, or report to the agent, Silvestre. Beyond doubt the supply is exhausted.

Convinced of this, the Chilean skipper determines to set sail with such crew as he has secured.

Nothing much now remains to be done. Some stores to be shipped, provisions for the voyage, the best and freshest San Francisco can afford. For he who authorizes the order cares not for the cost; only that things be made comfortable. Don Gregorio Montijo has given *carte blanche* for providing the table, and it is done according to his directions.

At length everything is ready; and the Condor only awaits her passengers. Her cabin has been handsomely furnished—its best stateroom decorated to receive two ladies, as fair as ever set foot aboard ship.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"ADIOS, CALIFORNIA!"

ANOTHER sunrise over San Francisco, in all likelihood the last Don Gregorio Montijo will ever witness in California. For just as the orb of day shows above the dark silhouette of Monte Diablo, flinging its golden shimmer across the bay, a boat leaves the town pier, bearing him and his toward the Chilean ship about to set sail.

Others are in the boat; a large party of ladies and gentlemen, who accompany him to do a last hand-shaking aboard the ship. For in quitting California the ex-haciendado leaves many friends behind; among them some who will pass sleepless hours thinking of Carmen Montijo; and others whose hearts will be sore as their thoughts turn upon Inez Alvarez.

It may be that none of them are in the boat; and better for them not. For the most painful of all partings is that where the lover sees his sweetheart sail away, with the knowledge she cares not to come back.

The two young girls going off show no sign of sorrow or regret. They are hindered by remembrance of the last words spoken at another and more painful parting. "Hasta Cadiz." The thought of that takes the sting out of this.

The boat reaches the ship; and, swinging around, lies alongside.

Captain Lautanas stands by the gangway to receive his passengers, with their friends; while his first officer helps them up the man-ropes.

Among the ladies Harry Blew distinguishes the two he is to have charge of; and with them is specially careful. As their soft-gloved fingers rest in his rough, horny hand, he mentally registers a vow, it shall never fall them in the time of need.

On the cabin table of the Condor is spread a refectory; and around it the leave-takers assemble, Captain Lautanas doing the honors of his ship. And gracefully; for the Chilean skipper is a gentleman.

Half an hour of merrymaking—light chatter, enlivened by the popping of corks, and clinking of glasses; then ten minutes of talk more serious; after which hurried graspings of the hand, and a general scattering toward the shore boat; which soon after moves off amid shouts of "Adios!" and "Buena noche!" accompanied by waving of hands; and white slender fingers saluting with tremulous motion, like the quiver of a kestrel's wing—the fashion of the Spanish-American fair.

While the boat is being rowed back to the shore, the Condor spreads sail, and stands away toward the sea.

She is soon out of sight of the port, having entered the strait which gives access to the great land-locked estuary of San Francisco.

But a wind blowing from the west hinders her running out direct; and she is all the day backing and filling through the eight miles of narrow water that connects the bay with the Pacific.

The sun is about to set as she passes the old Spanish fort, and opens view of the ocean. But the heavenly orb that rose over Monte Diablo resembling a globe of gold, goes down behind *Los Farallones* more like a ball of fire, seeking to be quenched in the sea.

It is still only half immersed in the blue liquid expanse, when, gliding out from the portals of the Golden Gate, the ship rounds Seal Rock, and stands on her course W. S. W.

The wind has shifted about; the evening breeze beginning to blow steadily from land. This is favorable; and after the tacks have been set, and the sails sheeted home, there is but little work to be done.

As it is the hour of the second dog-watch, the sailors are all on deck, grouped about the fore-castle, peacefully conversing. An odd individual stands by the side, with eyes turned shoreward, taking a last

look at California. Not as if he regretted leaving it, but rather glad to get away. More than one of the Condor's crew have reason to be thankful that the Chilean craft is carrying them from a country where, had they stayed, it would have been to be lodged in a jail.

Scarcely recovered from a carouse of the night before, they show swollen cheeks, and eyes inflamed with alcohol; countenances from which the breeze of the Pacific, however pure, can not remove the sinister expression. At sight of them, and the two fair creatures embarked in the same ship, a thought about the incongruity, as also the insecurity, of such companionship can not help coming uppermost. Like two beautiful birds of paradise shut up in the same cage with half a score of wolves, tigers, or hyenas.

But the birds of paradise are not troubling their heads about this, or anything else in the ship. Lingered about the binnacle, with their white fingers bent over the taffrail, they look back at the land, their eyes fixed upon the summit of a hill, ere long to sink beneath the sea, or become lost to view by the setting of the sun.

They have been standing so for some time in silence, when Inez says:

"I can tell what you're thinking of, *ita*."

"Indeed you can! Well, let me hear it."

"You're saying to yourself, 'What a beautiful hill that is yonder, and how I should like to be once more upon its top—not alone, but with somebody beside me!' Now, tell the truth; isn't that it?"

"Those are your own thoughts, *sobrina*."

"I admit it; and they are pleasant. They are yours, also—are they not?"

"Only in part. I have others, which I suppose you share with me."

"What others?"

"Reflections not at all pleasant; quite the contrary."

"Again distressing yourself about that. It does not give me any concern, and didn't from the first."

"No?"

"No."

"*Curral*! I must say you take things easily, which I don't. A lover—engaged too—to go off in that *sans facon*, unceremonious manner! Not so much as a note, nor even a verbal message. *Santissima*! It was something more than rude, Inez. It was cruel, and I can't help thinking so."

"But there was a message in the letter to grandpa for both of us. What more would you wish?"

"Pff! who cares for parting compliments? A *lepero* would send better to his sweetheart in sleeveless *cumisa*. That's not the message for me."

"How can we tell there wasn't some other that miscarried? I'm almost sure there has been; else why should somebody have been to our old house, and said so; the Americano left to take care of the place speaks of four men. Well, one of them might have been the messenger, the others going along with him for company. And through his neglect we've not got letters intended for us. If our friends did not write to us at all it's because they were pressed for time. We shall know when we meet them at Cadiz."

"Ah! When we meet them there I'll demand an explanation from Eduardo. That shall I, and get it, or know the reason why."

"He will give a good one, I warrant. There's some mistake somehow. For you know there's been mystery all round. No fighting as we feared, and have reason to rejoice. And nothing since seen of your Californian chivalry. That's the strangest of all."

"It is indeed strange," rejoins Carmen, seemingly startled by the remark. "I wonder what became of them. Nobody that we know has seen either after that day, nor heard of them."

"Carmen, I believe *one* has heard of them."

"Who?"

"Your father."

"What makes you think that, Inez?"

"Some words I overheard while he was conversing with the man who's now on the ship with us. I'm almost certain there was something in Don Eduardo's letter that related to De Lara and Calderon. What it was grandpapa seems desirous of keeping to himself, else he would have told us. We must try and find out from the sailor."

"You're an astute schemer, Inez; I should never have thought of that. We shall try. Now, I remember Don Eduardo saved this man's life. Wasn't it a noble deed? For all, I'm angry with him, for leaving me as he did, and shan't be otherwise till he gets upon his knees and apologizes for it. That he shall do at Cadiz."

"Well, I confess I was spited myself; at first and only a little. On reflection I feel sure there's some mischance, and we've been wronging them both. I won't blame mine till I see him at Cadiz. Then if he can't clear himself, I will."

"You forgive too easily, Inez. I can't."

"Yes, you can. Look at yonder hill! Recall the hours passed upon it, and you'll be lenient as I am."

Carmen obeys, and again turns her glance toward the spot sacred to sweet memories.

As she continues to gaze on it, the cloud lifts from her brow, and is replaced by a smile, that promises easy pardon to him who has offended.

In silence the two stand straining their eyes upon the far summit, till shore and sea become one, both blending into the purple shadow of twilight.

"Adios, California!"

Land no longer in sight. The ship is *au large* on the ocean.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A TATTOO THAT NEEDS RETOUCHING.

THE great Pacific current, in many respects, resembles the Gulf Stream of the Atlantic. Passing eastward under the Aleutian Archipelago, it impinges upon the American continent near the mouth of the Columbia river. Thence setting southward along the coast of California, it curves round horse-shoe shape, and strikes back for the center of the South Sea, sweeping on past the Sandwich Isles.

By this disposition a ship bound from San Francisco for Honolulu has the flow in her favor, and if the wind be also favorable will make fast way.

As chance has it, both are propitious to the Crusader; and the war-ship standing for the Sandwich Islands will likely reach them after a very quick voyage.

There are those on board of her who wish it to be so; counting every day, almost every hour, of her course. Not that they care particularly for any thing in the dominions of King Kamekamehala, or expect any great pleasure there; on the contrary, if it were left to them, the Crusader's stay in the harbor of Honolulu would not last longer than might be necessary to procure a boat-load of bananas, and replenish her hencoop with fat Kanaka fowls. There are two officers especially indifferent to the delights of Owyhee—the late-made lieutenant, Crozier, and the midshipman, Cadwallader. For them the bronzed Hawaiian beauties will have no attraction. Not the slightest danger of either yielding to the blandishments so lavishly bestowed by these seductive damsels of the Southern sea, for the hearts of both are yet thrilling with the remembrance of smiles vouchsafed by other daughters of the sunny South—of a far different race and land—held fast by the hope of again receiving these smiles in distant Andalusia. But it needs hope—all they can command—to sustain them. Not because the time is long, and the place distant. As sailors they are habituated to absence and patience. Nor is it any uneasiness about that which cast a cloud over their spirits before leaving San Francisco. That has long since passed away, succeeded by some repentance for having given way to a causeless chagrin. Their present trouble is not about the loyalty of their fiancées, but a fear for their safety. The feeling is not well defined nor understood by either. It is like some dream haunting them, at times so slight as to give scarce any uneasiness; at other times bordering on bitter anxiety. More than once have they exchanged thoughts on the subject. What they have seen and learnt of Calderon and De Lara made it not unnatural they should have misgivings about these men; and they have forebodings, fears that evil may arise through their influence. Something that may affect the future of Carmen Montijo and Inez Alvarez, and prevent their escape from California.

Escapel yes; that is the word the young officers make use of in their conversation—the shape in which the thought presents itself. Before reaching the Sandwich Islands there is a bit of intelligence which helps to cheer them. It has crept out that the Crusader is to make but short stay there and will not even enter the harbor of Honolulu. Her errand is to leave an official dispatch, with some commands for the consul in charge; after which they are to head round again and sail straight for Acapulco, or Panama.

"Good news, isn't it, Ned?" says Cadwallader to his senior, as the two sit side by side, conversing. "With the quick time we've made from Frisco, as those fellows call it, and no stay to speak of at the Sandwiches, we ought to get to the Isthmus almost as soon as the Condor."

"True, Cad. But it will a good deal depend upon the time the Chilean ship leaves San Francisco. No doubt she'd have great difficulty in getting sailors. Blew told you there was but the captain and himself?"

"Only they; and the cook, an old darkey—a runaway slave, he said. Besides, a brace of great red baboons. That was the crew of the Condor by last report."

"In one way we ought to like it," continues the midshipman. "It may give us the chance of reaching Panama before them, and as the frigate is to make some stay in that port, we might meet our girls again sooner than expected."

"I hope we shall; I'd be glad of it, Will, and it will lift a load off my mind."

"Mine too, Ned. Even if we don't reach Panama before them, we'll hear whether they've passed through it. If they have, that'll set things right. We'll then know they're safe and will be 'Hasta Cadiz.'"

"It seems a good one," says Crozier, reflectingly. "Our not going to be delayed at the Sandwiches. We ought to rejoice at that."

"I do," rejoins Cadwallader. "Though I confess there's something to cause me not to regret, but a little disappointment."

"Indeed! What is it?"

"These!" says the midshipman, pulling up his shirt-sleeve and laying his arm bare up to the elbow. "Look at that, lieutenant!"

The lieutenant looks, and sees upon the skin white as alabaster a cartoon of tattooing. It is the figure of a young girl, somewhat scantily robed, with long, streaming tresses; hair, contour, countenance, every thing done in the deepest indigo.

"Some old sweetheart?" suggests Crozier.

"It is."

"But she can't be a Sandwich Island belle; you've never been there?"

"No, she isn't. She's a little Chilena, whose acquaintance I made last spring, while we lay at Valparaiso. Grunnet, the cutter's coxswain, did the tattoo for me as we came up the Pacific. He hadn't quite time to finish it, as you see. There was to be a picture of the Chilean flag over her head, and underneath the girl's name or initials."

"But what the deuce has all this to do with our stay at the Sandwich Islands?"

"Only that I intended to have the thing taken out again. Grunnet tells me he can't do it, but that the Kanakas can. He says they've got some trick for extracting the stain, leaving the skin the same as before or only slightly scarred."

"But why need you care, lad? I acknowledge tattooing is not nice, on the epidermis of a gentleman, and I've met scores like yourself sorry for having submitted to it. After all, what does it signify? Nobody need ever see it unless you wish them to."

"There's where you mistake. Somebody might see it, without my wishing—sure to see it if ever I get—"

"What?"

"Spliced."

"Ah! Inez!"

"Yes, Inez. Now you understand why I'd like to spend a day or two among the South Sea Islanders. If I can't get the thing taken out, I'll be in a dilemma. I know dear Inez would be indulgent in a good many ways; but when she sees that blue image on my arm, she'll look black as thunder. And what am I to say? I told her she was the first sweetheart I ever had; as you know, Ned, a little bit of a lie. Only a white one; for the little Chilena was not an

affection, only a fancy long ago out of my mind. The question is, how she's to be got out of the skin. And I'd give something to get an answer to it."

"If that's all, you needn't be at any expense, except what you may tip to old Grunnet. You say he hadn't completed the portrait of your Chilena. That's plain enough, looking at the shortness of the skirt. Now let him go on and lengthen them a little. Then finish by pricking the Spanish flag over her head, and under her feet the initials 'I. A.' With that on your arm, you may safely show it at Cadiz; and instead of reproaches, you'll get kisses."

"A splendid idea! The very thing! I'll have it as you say. This very day I'll set Grunnet to work, and—"

"Land, ho!"

The conversation between the young officers is interrupted. The look-out at the Crusader's mast-head has sighted Mauma Koa.

CHAPTER XLV.

A CREW THAT MEANS MUTINY.

A SHIP sailing down the Pacific, on the line of longitude 125° W.

Technically speaking, not a ship, but a barque, as may be told by her mizzen-sails set fore and aft.

Of all craft encountered on the ocean there is none in beauty to compare with the barque. Just as the name is graceful on the page of poetry and romance, so is the reality itself on the surface of the sea. The sight is simply perfection.

About the vessel in question another peculiarity is observable. Her masts are of the kind called *Polacca*—in one piece from step to truck.

Such are common enough in the Mediterranean, and not rare in Spanish American ports. They may be seen at Monte Video, Buenos Ayres, and Valparaiso, to which last this barque belongs. For she is Chilean-built; her masts made of trees taken from the ancient forests of Araucania.

Lettered along her stern is the name EL CONDOR, and she is the craft commanded by Captain Lautanas.

In the harbor of San Francisco the Condor was a ship. How can she now be a barque?

The answer is easy, as has been the transformation; while the reason is readily given. For the working of her sails, a barque requires fewer hands than a ship. Finding himself with a short crew, Captain Lautanas resorted to a stratagem not uncommon in such cases, and converted his vessel accordingly. The conversion was effected before leaving San Francisco; so that the Condor, entering the Golden Gate a ship, stood out of it a barque.

As this, she is now on the ocean sailing southward along the line of longitude, 125 deg. W.

Taking the usual track of sailing-vessels between San Francisco and the Isthmus, she has first made westing to get well clear of the coast and catch the regular wind that centuries ago waited the spice-laden Spanish galleons from the Philippines to Acapulco. A steamer from the Isthmus would hug the shore, keeping the brown, barren mountains of Lower California in view. Instead the Condor has run wide away from the land, and in all probability will not again sight it before beginning to beat up for the Bay of Panama.

It is middle watch of the night. Eight bells have sounded and the first mate has taken charge; the second having turned in along with the division of crew allotted to him.

The sea is tranquil, the breeze light, blowing from the desired quarter, so that there is nothing to call for any unusual vigilance. True, the night is dark, but without portent of storm. It is, as Harry Blew knows, only a thick rain-cloud, such as often shadows this part of the Pacific. But the darkness need not be dreaded. They are too low in latitude to encounter icebergs, and upon the wide waters of the South Sea there is not much danger of collision by ships.

Notwithstanding this reason for security, the first mate of the Condor paces his deck with a brow clouded as the sky over his head; while the glance of his eye betrays anxiety, almost anguish; as if some thought was torturing him.

It can not be any fear of storm or tempest. He does not regard the sky, nor the sea, nor the sails. On the contrary, he moves about the deck, not as one having command of the vessel, but stealthily, now and then standing in crouched attitude under the shadow of her masts, bulwarks, and boats. He appears not to occupy himself about the elements, nor yet with the sails of the ship, but to be playing spy upon the men intrusted with the working of them.

For what he is doing he has reason. Long before leaving San Francisco he has discovered the incapacity of the crew—a bad lot it could be seen at first sight, rough, ribald and drunken. In all there are eleven of them, the second mate included, as already stated, a Spaniard by name, Padillo.

There are three others of this nationality, Spaniards or Spanish-Americans, Gil Gomez, Jose Fernandez and Jacinto Velarde; two Englishmen are entered on the books as Jack Striker and Bill Davis; a Frenchman, a Dutchman and a Dane; the other two men are of sailor type, but doubtful nationality, such as are met on every ship that sails the sea.

The first mate of the Condor, accustomed to man-of-war discipline, is disgusted by the absence of it on board the merchant ship. This is his reflection before leaving San Francisco Bay. Along with it, some anxiety about the working of the ship. With a crew so incapable there must be difficulty, and may be danger.

Now that he is out upon the open ocean, the feeling is different, as also the danger dreaded. Observing their insubordination, he fears there may be mutiny. All the more from having by this time become acquainted with the character of Captain Lautanas. A fair enough seaman, after a fashion, scientific, with a taste for natural history and collecting curiosities (proof of this in the two great Bornean apes, with many other specimens picked up during his trading trip to the Indian Archipelago), but, of all men, the most unfitted to control a crew such as that now shipped for the voyage to Valparaiso.

Besides being insolent and reluctantly obedient, Harry Blew has observed them at times gathered in groups, as if plotting some capital crime.

What it is he can not tell; nor yet the cause of their conspiring. They are well fed, indulged in extra rations of both grub and grog. No rough work has yet been required of them—nothing done to wound the sensibility or excite the ire of a sailor. For all that they look scowling and discontented; as if a slight slur, even a hard word, would make mutiny among them.

What can it mean? What do they want?

A score of times has Harry Blew asked himself this question, without getting any satisfactory answer. It is to obtain this he is now skulking around the decks, here and there, standing in shadows. He has hopes of overhearing some conversation that will give him a clew to the conspiracy—if conspiracy it be.

He is not disappointed.

A chance circumstance provides against this. He is standing in the ship's waist under a piece of sail-cloth, spread horizontally from the rail to the top of the round-house. It has been rigged up as a sun-screen for the carpenter doing some work during the day, and is so left.

As the sky is pitch black and starless, with this additional shadow, Harry Blew stands in obscurity impenetrable to the eye. A man passing within six feet could not see him.

He is not seen by two men, who, sauntering about like himself, have stepped in under the shadow of the canvas. Unlike him they are not silent but conversing—though in a low tone, loud enough for him to hear every word. And to every one he listens with interest so engrossing, that his breath seems suspended. Standing fixed and invisible, could either of the men see him, they might suppose him a statue or bollard head, stanchioned in the deck.

He understands what is said all the easier, as they talk in his own native tongue. For they who converse are Jack Striker and Bill Davis. Long before their dialogue reaches its termination, it not only gives him an insight into what has been hitherto mystifying him, but something that sets his hair on end, and causes the blood to curdle in his veins.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"SYDNEY DUCKS."

JACK STRIKER and Bill Davis are two Sydney ducks, who have done service in the chain-gangs of Australia.

They have also served as sailors, their original calling. Since a certain voyage to the Swan river settlement, in which they were only passengers, sent out at the expense of H. B. Majesty's Government, they have been rather inclined to cut the sea, and only take to it now and then, by way of working passage from place to place.

Escaping from a colonization forced upon them and altogether uncongenial, they have found their way first to Sydney and afterward to San Francisco. Thence they have been up the Sacramento, taken a spell at gold-digging with but slight success, and not liking the hard labor of pick, pan and cradle, have returned to the Queen City of the Pacific.

Loitering among low sailors' haunts, they have had the pleasant surprise in meeting a man who offered them ten thousand dollars each to ship in a merchant vessel, bound for the port of Panama. A wage so disproportioned to the service asked for, of course calls for explanation, which the princely contractor gives after gaining their confidence.

It proves satisfactory to the *ci-devant* convicts, and without further question they enter into a contract, which carries them aboard the Condor, this being the ship that is to pay sailors \$10,000 for the "short trip to Panama." He who has thus extravagantly engaged them is not owner of the ship, nor is he her skipper, or supercargo, but a man who represents himself authorized to accept their services in a different way; and he also promises the pay in a peculiar manner, made known to them before setting foot aboard ship, and Jack Striker and Bill Davis know with a full understanding sufficient if honest tars to make them refuse the high wages coupled with their conditions.

But they are not honest tars, and accept both condition and wages, without scruple or cavil.

Since coming aboard the Condor, and mixing with others of her crew, they have got some additional insight into the character of the compact and the service required of them. They find that several of their shipmates—in fact nearly all the crew—have been engaged in a similar way and for a like bounteous wage. At first all are a little in wonder, but on comparing notes, and mutually comparing their respective scraps of information, adding also their surmises, they arrive at a pretty accurate knowledge of why they have been engaged to work the Chilean ship.

Striker, who has seen more of the world, and is an older sinner than Davis, has got a better idea of how things are, and it is for the purpose of communicating his superior knowledge to his old chum of the chain-gang he has asked him to step under the awning.

By chance cast together in the middle-watch, an opportunity offers which the elder convict has been looking out for. Davis, of more talkative habit, is the first to speak as soon as under the shadow.

"Well, old pal. What do you think of our present employ? Better than breakin' stone for them Swan river roads, with twenty pounds o' iron chain clinkin' at a fella's feet, ain't it?"

"Better'n that, yes; but not's good as it mout be."

"Tut, man; you're always grumblin'. Ten thousand dollars for a trip that isn't likely to run over a fortnight, or three weeks at most. If that don't content you, I'd like to know what would."

"Well, mate, I'll tell 'ee what would. Thirty thousand for the trip; and Jack Striker ain't likely to be satisfied wi' anything short o' it."

"You're joking, Jack."

"No I ain't, Bill. As you knows, I'm not of the jokin' sort, and now means wot I say. Both me an' you oughter geet thirty thousand apiece o' this yeller stuff—that at the very least."

"Why, there wouldn't be enuff to go round the lot that's in."

"Yes, there w'd an' will. Old as I'm, I hain't quite lost hearin'. My yeers are as sharp as iver they wor, an' jess as reliable. Larst night I heerd a whisper pass between two o' them Spanish chaps that's put me up to somethin'."

"What did you hear?"

"That the swag totes up to the full o' \$300,000."

"The devil it does! I didn't know it was half that much."

"Ye know't now; an' knowin' it, do 'ee think, Bill Davis, we oughter be such domned fools as to take lesser'n share an' share alike? We can git it as eazy as the other if we stan' together an' stick out for it."

"Theer's somethin' in what you say."

"Theer's everythin'. Besides, it's our rights. Weer riskin' our necks in a rope same's them. If we make a snucker o' the job it'll be a hangin' matter; sure as I speak theer's got to be sum blood spilt afore all's finished."

"What would you advise? You know, Jack, I'll stand by yer, whatever you're inclined for."

"Well, I'm inclined for a fair divide all roun'. I don't see why the four Spanish chaps sh'd get a dollar more'n us others. Two o' them's got theer eyes on the women. It's eazy to see that's theer game. Besides, I heerd them talkin'. Gomez are arter the light gurl, and Fernandez wants the dark 'un. Well, they can have 'em fur all's I care. But that are good reezon why they oughtn't be greedy 'bout the stuff. 'Twar Gomez as engaged us, an' plain he's the he'd man o' the lot, though the second mate 's in along wi' them, too. I overhear' a confab atween they two, Gomez tellin' t'other there were full \$300,000 valley o' dust lyin' snug in the cabin lockers. An' as theer's eleven o' us to share, it 'ud be nigh on \$30,000 apiece, if my 'rithmetic ar'n't out o' reck'nin'. Bill Davis, we must go in for rights."

"As you say, Jack, it is our rights. No doubt of that, only there may be some difficulty in gettin' them."

"Not a bit—not a bit, if we stan' up for 'em. There be four Spanish fellows as mean to go snacks 'mong themselves. But theer be six o' us outsiders, an' when the others get wind o' what I've told ye, they'll be all on our side, if they ar'n't fools."

"They won't be that, I take it. A difference of twenty thousand dollars in their favor will make 'em sensible for the time. But what's to be the upshot, or, as they call it on the play-bills of the theaters, what's our programme?"

"Well, mate, so far as I've been put up to 't, we're to run on till we get down the coast somewhere near the Ismus of Panyma. Theer we'll sight land; an' soon as we do, the ship's to be scuttled, we first securin' the swag an' takin' it ashore in one o' the boats. We're to land in on some part of the coast that's known to Gomez he says. Then we're to make to one o' the towns, when we've got things straight for puttin' in appearance in an explainable way. Otherwise we might get pulled up, and then all our trouble 'ud be for nout. Worse; every one o' us 'ud ha' a good chance to swing for it."

"The two gurls?"

"They're to be took along. How the chaps mean to manage it Jack Striker can't tell ye. They'll be a trouble, no doubt, as wimmen always is, an' in my idea it's folly to be hampered wi' 'em. More'n that, it's durned dangerous. They may git us all into a scrape. However, I s'pose we must submit to it. The two fellows appear to be ragin' mad about 'em; an' by lettin' 'em have their way they'll have less to say against a fair divide o' the dollars."

"What's to be done with the others—the old Spaniard, and skipper, with the black cook and the first mate?"

"Theer to be sent down in the ship. The intention is to knock 'em on the head soon's we come in sight o' land."

"Well, Jack, for the first three I don't care a tinker's d—n. They're foreigners and blacks, therefore nothin' to us. But Blew's a sort of a countryman. I'd rather we could let him go."

"Balderdash, Bill Davis! What have we got to do with feelin' o' that sort? Countryman, indeed! A pretty country as starves ten millions o' the likes o' me an' you; an' if we try to take what by nateral right be ours, sends us out o' it wi' chains on our wrists and ankles. All stuff and psalm-singin', that about your own country and a fella-countryman. If we let him go, he'd be sure to tell tales, an' we might meet him somewhere when we weren't wantin'. He's got to go, but it must be wi' the t'other three—to the bottom o' the sea."

"Maybe you're right, Striker, and on second thought I don't care a dump what's done wi' him more'n any of the others. But what's the use of keepin' the thing back? And why should we wait till we get down there? If the yellow stuff's lyin' ready why can't it be grabbed at once, and then we can talk about how it's to be divided? Sure, there can't be no trouble in takin' it?"

"Tain't the takin' o' it. Thet'll be eazy work, an' we'll have it all our way. We could toss the four overboard in the skippin' o' a flea. But, then, how's the ship to be navigated?"

"We don't want the skipper for that, nor the first mate eyther. Surely we can do without them."

"That's jest what we want. O' all our crew there's only them two as has the knowledge o' charts an' chronometers an' the like, for him as is acting second mate confesses he don't know nothin' 'bout sich. Therefore, though we're in a good, sonn' craft, without them we'd be most as good as helpless. We're now out on the biggest of all the oceans, an' if we stood on the wrong tack, we might never get sight o' land, or only to be cast away on some dangerous shore, or, what 'ud be bad as eyther, get overhauled by some man-o'-war, and not able to gie account o' ourselves. There's the difficulty, don't 'ee see? So they's konkluded to let things stan' till we run down nigh to Panyma. Theer we'll settle up by scuttlin' the ship an' goin' ashore in the night."

"Well, I suppose that'll be the best after all. When a cove's got money it don't make much difference where he sets his foot on shore; and I suppose there's sport to be had down in Panyma, same as other places."

"Theer ye be right, Bill. When a man's got money there's pleasurin' everywhere; an' he as hasn't none can't git it nowhere. Gold is the only thing as can gie it."

"Well, old pal, with the prospect of such big plunder, we can afford to be patient."

"I ain't a-goin' to be patient for the \$10,000. No, Bill Davis; neyther ought you. We've equal rights wi' the rest, an' we must ageetate till we get 'em."

"Say the word, Jack, an' I'll stan' by ye—so'll the others that's in the same boat wi' ourselves."

"They oughter, and belike will, tho' there's a weak-witted fool or two may take talkin' into it. I mean to go at 'em at once, soon's I've hed my spell at the wheel, which is comin' on next. Theer's the bell now, I must be aft. When I come off, you, Bill, be up at the knight-heads, an' hev that Dutch chap as is on the watch 'long wi' ye. An' also the Dane. They're the likeliest to go in wi' us, an' we'll broach it to them furst."

"All right, Jack. I'll be there."

The two plotters step out from under the shelter. Striker turning aft to take his trick at the helm, the other sauntering off toward the head.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A DIRE DELIBERATION.

HARRY BLEW stands aghast—his hair on end, the blood coursing chill through his veins.

No wonder, after listening to such a revelation!

A plot diabolical—a scheme of atrocity unparalleled, comprising three capital crimes; robbery, the abduction of women, and the murder of men, among the last himself!

Now knows he the cause of the crew's insubordination; too clearly comprehends it.

\$300,000 aboard the barque; stowed in her cabin lockers. News to him; for neither Captain Lautanas nor Don Gregorio had made him acquainted with the fact; the treasure having been shipped in the shape of other merchandise, along with various effects. He helped to get barrels and boxes aboard, ignorant of their contents, only known to the owner, Silvestre and Lautanas.

An unfortunate move on the part of Don Gregorio Montijo—one likely to prove disastrous, not only to himself, but those dear to him, with others less interested linked to his fate.

Though easy of comprehension, it is some time before the ex-man-o'-war-man can summon all the details before his mind. He is in truth so held with astonishment as to have confused thoughts not untinted with terror. Soon he reflects more calmly, and revolving every thing over sees clearly the scheme of the pirates, as also the abyss that yawns open before him.

There can be no ambiguity about the nature of the first, nor yet as to its inception. It has all been arranged ashore, and the scoundrels have come aboard with the special design of carrying it into execution. The four Spaniards or Californians as he believes them to be, must have had knowledge of the treasure being shipped, and in their plan to appropriate it have engaged the others to assist them. Striker's talk has told this, while revealing also the terrible intention of the plunderers, to add abduction and murder.

The prospect is fearful; and as he reflects upon it, Harry Blew, stout of heart though he be, can not help feeling appalled. For he can not help seeing that a dread fate is impending over himself as well as those he has promised to protect.

How is it to be averted?

The interrogatory comes after he has taken in all the details of the danger; no sign of safety, nothing that seems to offer a loop-hole of escape. The crew are all in the conspiracy, every man of them—either as principals or engaged assistants. The conversation of the two convicts has shown this. The second mate same as the rest, which to him, Harry Blew, has caused little surprise. He had already made up his mind about this fellow, observing his sympathy with those showing insubordination. He had already noticed that in whatever was brewing, the sailor Gil Gomez was the directing spirit. A man bearded black, whose glance from under a slouching sou'-wester, which he always wore, was sent forth sinister as that of a shark. Velarde seemed next in influence, both dominating Padillo, notwithstanding his authority as one of the ship's officers; while Jose Fernandez was controlled by all these. The last had been discovered to be a landsman, with no sea experience whatever, when found out excusing himself on the plea that he wished to work his passage to Panama. The position of the others was comprehensible from what Striker had said. All were in the scheme of pillage and murder, though not to be equal in the reward.

Bringing them one after another before his mind, recalling his experience of them, which, though short, has given him some knowledge of their characters, Harry Blew can not think of one likely to take sides with him. They are all men of iniquity, and in defending the innocent he will have to stand alone. For it is almost the same as being alone, with no other help than Captain Lautanas and Don Gregorio and the cook. The first a slight man, with just strength enough to handle a telescope; the second aged, and still something of an invalid; the third, for fighting purposes, scarce worth thinking of. His fidelity could be depended upon to the death. But he is also an oldish man, and would count for little in a conflict with such desperadoes, as those designing to make themselves masters of the ship.

All this presents itself to the mind of the first mate, clearly, impressively. A thought of telling Captain Lautanas what he has discovered, and which came naturally, he no longer entertains. The trusting Chilean skipper would scarce give credit to such an atrocious scheme. And if he did, in all likelihood it would result in his taking some rash step that would but quicken the fatal conclusion. No; he must not be made acquainted with the dread danger impending. Nor yet Don Gregorio. The terrible secret must be kept from both, and carefully too. Should either come to know it, in an hour all might be over—the tragedy enacted, and its victims consigned to the bottom of the sea.

Still crouching under the sail, Harry Blew has this before his mind in all its startling reality.

And yet what hope of averting it in the end? In the midst of the open ocean or close to land it must come to the same. Soon as the latter is sighted, the gold to be seized along with the girls. Captain Lautanas, Don Gregorio and himself to be shot down, or poniarded; after that the ship to be sunk by scuttling. No trace left save the boat that bears the fiendish plunderers away with their victims and their spoils!

In contemplation of all this it is not strange that the Condor's first officer feels a shivering throughout his frame.

It is enough to send dismay to the stoutest heart—even that of an old man-o'-war's-man—even that of brave Harry Blew. He feels it in every fiber. And reflection fails to give relief, since it suggests no scheme by which the danger may be averted. On the contrary, it discloses it darker and darker in all its stark-naked reality.

Against such odds a conflict would be hopeless. It could only end in death to all who have been devoted to die, and among these the first would be himself.

Harry Blew knows this, is sure of it, and stands in doubtful cogitation. With despair at his heart, he is unable to think clearly. Still varied schemes course through his mind, wild thoughts welling up in his soul.

At length a resolve is made—betrayed in his muttered speech. His countenance, in shadow, cannot be seen. If it could it would surely show an expression unworthy of a Yankee sailor—that of a traitor.

For, judging by the words that fell in soliloquy from his lips, he has yielded to cowardly fear, surrendered up the sacred trust reposed in him, and along with it his honor.

The words are:

"There's no chance for that, nor yet for the savin' of my own life, except by castin' my lot in along wi' them. Dashed if I don't do it!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

PLOT UPON PLOT.

THE CONDOR is sailing large, with a light breeze five points abaft the beam.

Jack Striker is at the wheel, having but lately commenced his trick.

As the sea is smooth, he finds it easy steering; little to do but hold the spokes in hand, and give an occasional glance at the compass card.

The moon, which has just risen, and shining in his face, shows it to be that of a man over fifty, with the felon in its every line and lineament. It is bearded, peck-pitted, with thick, shapeless lips, broad, hanging jowls, nostrils agape, and nose flattened like the snout of a bull-dog. Eyes gossling green, both bleary, one of them blood-shot. For all eyes that, by his own boast, can see into a millstone as far as the man who picks it.

He has not been many minutes at the wheel when they do duty by observing some one who approaches from the waist of the ship. A man, of course, whom he makes out to be the first mate. He might guess as much; no one else having business aft at that hour.

"Comin' to con me," growls the ex-convict. "Don't want any o' his connin', blarst him! Jack Striker can keep a ship to her coorse well's him, or any other 'board o' this craft."

Striker is on the starboard side of the wheel. The man making approach comes along the port gangway; and after climbing to the poop-deck stops opposite him. It is Harry Blew.

"Well, Striker," he says, "not much trouble steering to-night. She's goin' free, too; wind in the right quarter. We ought to be makin' good nine knots?"

"All o' that, I dar' say, sir," rejoins Striker, mollified by the affable manner in which the first officer has addressed him. "The barque ain't a bad 'un to go; tho' she be a queery rigged craft as iver I set foot aboard on."

"And you've set foot on a goodish many I should say, judging from the way you handle a helm. I see you understan' steerin'."

"I oughter, Master Blew," answers the helmsman, further flattered by the compliment to his professional skill. "Jack Striker's had a fair show o' schoolin' to the bizness—that are in days good by."

"Been a man-o'-war's-man, ha'n't you?"

"Ay, all o' that. Any as doubts it can see the warrant on my back, an' welcome to do so. Plenty o' the cat's claws there, an' Jack Striker don't care a curse who knows it."

"Neyther need ye. Many a good sailor can show the same. For myself I ha'n't had the cat, but I've see'd man-o'-war service, an' got rough treatment, too. An' I've see'd service on ships man-o'-war's men have chased—likin' that sort better."

"Indeed!" exclaims the ex-convict, turning his eyes with increased interest on the man thus freely confessing himself. "Smuggler? May be slaver?"

"Little bit o' both. An' as you say 'bout the cat, I don't care a curse who knows it. It's been a hardish world wi' me; plenty o' ups an' downs; the downs oftener than the ups. Just now things are looking a little uppish. I've got my berth here 'count o' the scarcity o' hands in San Francisco, an' the luck o' knowin' how to take sights an' keep a log. Still the pay ain't much, considerin' the chances left behind. I dare say I'd 'a' done a deal better by stayin' in Californy an' goin' on to them gold-washin's up the Sacramento."

"You ha'n't been there, ha'n't ye?"

"No. Never went a yard ayont the town o' San Francisco."

"May be jest as well ye didn't, Master Blew. Me an' Bill Davis tried that dodge, an' went all the way to the washin's on Feather river. We foun' no gold, but plenty o' hard work, wi' precious little to eat, an' less in the way o' drink. Neyther o' us likin' the life, we put track for the port."

For all his frankness in confessing to the cat-o'-nine-tails on board a war-ship, Striker is reticent about a rope of a different kind he and his chum Davis were very near getting around their necks on the banks of the Feather river. For a crime there committed, they escaped capital punishment by a timely retreat toward San Francisco.

"Well," rejoins Blew, in a tone of self-consolation, "maybe after all I've done well in not goin' that way. I might 'a' come back empty-handed as yourself an' Davis. Ye say liquor was scarce up there. That would never done for me. I must have my regular allowance or— Well, no use sayin' what. As an old man-o'-war's man you can understan' me. An' as the same, I suppose you won't object to takin' a tot now?"

"Two, for that matter," promptly responds Striker, like all his sort, drouthy.

"Well, here's a drop o' ruin—the best Santa Cruz. Help yerself."

Harry Blew presents a bottle to the helmsman; who, detaching one hand from the spoke, takes hold and carries it to his lips; there keeping it for at least

twenty seconds. When returned to its owner it feels lighter by a third, in the same proportion emptier.

The mate takes a drink himself, for the sake of sociability; then resumes the interrupted dialogue.

Which progresses more amicably than ever; the Santa Cruz, as it filters through the Sydney Duck, after a fashion, making him friendly.

Now the two talk in full familiarity; the mate throwing aside all reserve, and letting himself down to a level with the foremastman.

It ends in their establishing a confidence mutual and complete, of the character known as "thickness between thieves."

Blew first strikes the chord that puts them *en rapport* by saying:

"Ye tell me, Jack Striker, that ye've had hard times an' some severe punishment. So's had Harry Blew. An' ye don't care about that; no more do he—not a brass farden. In that we're both o' us in the same boat. An' now we're in the same ship—you as a sailor afore the mast, I first mate. But, for all the difference in our rank, we can work together. An' there's a way we may both o' us do better. Do you want me to tell it to yer?"

"Ay, ay; tell it. Jack Striker's ears are allers open to hear how he can better his sittivation in life. He's a-listenin'."

"All right. As I've said, you're a good hand at the helm. Would ye be as good to go in for a job that'll put a pile o' money in your pocket?"

"That depends on what sort o' money an' how much."

"Good solid gold—in dust. An' as much as you can carry; ay, there's enough to make you stagger under it."

"Am I good for a job like that? Funny question to ask, it are; 'pecially puttin' it to ole Jack Striker. He's good for it wi' the gallows starin' him full in the face."

"Well, I thought you wouldn't be the one to be basket-faced in fear. It's a big thing I've on hand: an' there'll be a fortune for all o' those who go in with me."

"Show Jack Striker the chance o' goin' in, an' he'll show you the man as knows no backin' out."

"Enough, shipmate. The chance is close at hand; aboard o' this ship. In her cabin there's stowed somethin' like half a ton o' glitterin' gold-dust; it belongs to the old Spaniard that's passenger. An' what's to hinder us from layin' hands on it? If we can only get enough o' the crew to say y'es, there needs be no difficulty. Them as won't will have to stand aside; though from what I see o' them, it's like they'll all come in. Divided square round, there'd be between twenty and thirty thousand dollars apiece. Does that tempt ye, Striker?"

"Rayther. Wi' twenty thousand dollars I'd ne'er do another stroke o' work."

"You needn't, then. Ye can have all o' that by formin' in, an' helpin' me to bring round the rest. Do you know any o' them ye can speak to—with safety, I mean?"

"Two or three—one sartin; my ole chum, Bill Davis. He can be trusted in a secret o' throat-cuttin', let alone a trifle sich as you're speakin' about. And now, Master Blew, since you've see'd fit to confide in me, I'm goin' to g'ie you a bit o' my confidence. It's but fair atween two men as hev got to understan' one the t'other. I may's well tell ye, that I knew all about the stuff in the cabin. Me an' Bill Davis war talkin' o' thet just afore I coom'd to the wheel. You ain't the only one as hev set their heart on seizin' it. Them Spanish chaps hev got it arranged already, an' hed afore they set fut aboard the barque. Thar's four o' 'em, countin' second mate, as I take it, all standin' in square, whiles the rest o' the crew only gets so much o' a fixed sum. That's the way Gomez engaged me and Bill Davis, promisin' us \$3000 apiece. He 'pears to be master 'mong 'em, though Padillo are second mate."

"Striker, ye 'stonish me."

"Well, I'm on'y tellin' ye what be true. I'm glad you're agreeable to go in wi' us, the which'll save trouble, an' yer own life as well. For I may tell ye, Master Blew, that they'd made up their minds to send ye to the bottom 'long wi' skipper and the ole Spaniard."

"That's a nice bit o' news to tell a chap, it is. But I'm thankful to you for communicatin' it. Lord! it's lucky for me that we've chanced this night to get talkin' together."

"Thar may be luck in't all roun'. Bill an' me'd made up o'r minds to stan' out for an equal divide o' the dust, like shares to every man. If thar be eny dispute 'bout that bein' fair, wi' you on our side, I take it, we'll eazy settle it our way, spite o' them Spaniards. If they refuse to agree, an' it cooms to fightin', Jack Striker's good for any two o' 'em."

"An' I for any other two. No fear but we can fix that. How many do you think will be with us?"

"Most all, I reckon, 'cept the Spaniards themselves. It consarns the rest same's it do us. 'Tall events we're bound to ha' the majority."

"When would you propose to begin broachin' it to them?"

"Straight away if you say the word. Soon's I've goed off from here. Thur be several on the watch as'll be takin' a drop together fore we turns in. Thur be no time better nor now."

"Then now do it, Striker; but mind ye, mate, go cautious about the thing, and don't commit eyther of us too far till you've larnt their temper. I'll meet ye on the first dog-watch to-morrow, then you can tell me how the land's likely to be."

"All right; I'll see to't in the smooth way. You can trust Jack Striker for that."

"Take another suck at the Santa Cruz. If this trip proves prosperous in the way we're plannin' it, neyther you nor me'll need to go without the best o' good liquor for the rest o' our lives."

Again Striker clutches at the proffered bottle, and holds it to his head—this time till he has drained it dry.

Returned to him empty, Harry Blew tosses it overboard. Then parting from the steersman, he commences moving forward, as with the design to look after other duties.

As he steps out from under the shadow of the spanker, the moon gleaming athwart his face, shows on it an expression that neither pen nor pencil can depict. The most skilled physiognomist would be puzzled to say whether it be the reproach of conscious guilt, or innocence in despair, drawn to desperation!

CHAPTER XLIX.

REPELLED.

SEA-SICKNESS is no respecter of persons—at least, when these go to sea for the first time. Voyagers of every age, and either sex, must pay toll to that terrible *mal de mer*, which it equally exacts from the strong, robust youth, and the frail, delicate maiden. Even beauty must submit to the disagreeable affliction: the red lip and rose-tinted cheek for a time showing wan and pallid.

It is not the first voyage made by Carmen Montijo and Inez Alvarez; both have been at sea before, on their passage from Spain, but that was long ago, and now anew upon the ocean, they experience the old pang as acutely as ever. Stricken down by it for several days, they keep to the cabin, most of the time confining themselves to their stateroom. As ill-luck has it, they have no one of their own sex to attend upon them, this arising from two circumstances, not foreseen. One that there is no stewardess on the trading-ship; the other that their own maid, who was to have accompanied them, failed in her engagement. Having undertaken another with a swain of San Francisco, she was missing at the last moment of departure from the port.

With all, they are not so ill off. The old negro cook, acting steward, comes up to the occasion, and waits upon them with delicate assiduity. And Captain Lautanas is constant in attentions, placing most of his idle hours at their disposal. In due time they recover, Carmen first, from being of stronger constitution, and both at length venture upon deck.

During their sojourn below they have had communication with no one save Don Gregorio—like themselves an invalid—the captain, and cook, but not any of the other officers or sailors of the ship. On none of these have they set eyes, though there is one they very much want to see, and also speak with. It is the American sailor whom they know to have been made chief mate. Now that they are restored to health and strength, their thoughts return to a theme spoken of when taking their last look at the land; an intention then expressed to interrogate Harry Blew on some matters remaining unexplained, and yet giving pain. About the abrupt departure of their lovers they have no need to inquire; its cause they have learnt long ago. But why no letter sent save that to Don Gregorio, with its salutation to themselves, so cold and ceremoniously formal? This it is that makes them anxious for an interview with the sailor, both believing that he may have been intrusted with secrets that concern them.

From the way Crozier spoke of, while recommending him—taking into account also his having saved the sailor's life, Carmen cannot think otherwise than that this man should know much about his patron and preserver. Among other knowledge, perhaps a little of his love affairs. She recalls certain words spoken jocularly by the tar while at the house, partaking of the hospitality there extended to him. She now longs to hold conversation with him, in hopes of having these words repeated, with fuller explanation.

And so also Inez, who can likewise recall some allusions to Willie Cadwallader.

They are on the quarter-deck, in front of the cabin door: seated on chairs brought out for them. Captain Lautanas, who has escorted them on deck and carried up the chairs, is by their side. He stays there endeavoring to entertain them by pointing out objects on the ship, and explaining their uses.

This after they have bent their eyes over the sea; and seen nothing but its blue expanse, on all sides extending till it meets the paler blue of the sky. They give but little heed to the technical dissertations of the well-meaning skipper. And only a passing glance to the objects pointed out.

Two strange forms for a moment occupy their attention, creatures covered with reddish hair, that go gamboling about the deck, displaying uncouth gestures, and uttering a hoarse jargon, painfully like human speech.

On those Captain Lautanas for a time dilates, describing them as *Nyas* monkeys, brought by him from Borneo, and proceeding to give a detailed account of their habits. Little care the two señoritas to hear the natural history of the ourang-outang, and little do they listen to it.

After a glance at the hideous brutes, their eyes turn toward the fore-deck, and scan the forms and faces of men moving over it. They there observe some that, instead of pleasing, repel them; countenances of sinister cast, that appear scowling. Among them none resembling that of the American sailor; for his they remember to have been smiling and cheerful. He is not there.

Despite his considerate kindness, they grow tired of Captain Lautanas, and wish to be quit of him. In time they have their wish. The skipper has other duties to attend to, and, making an apology, leaves them to themselves.

Alone, they again glance over the decks, first forward. Then, rising to their feet, they look aft, scanning every part of the vessel from stem to stern. But they can see nothing of the sailor, Blew. There are others who look like Americans, but not the one wanted.

While thus vainly interrogating they hear the tolling of a bell. It gives eight strokes, telling the time to be twelve o'clock, meridian.

Simultaneously they perceive a movement among the men upon the forward deck. Some disappear down a hatchway, while others come scrambling up it.

To the señoritas there is nothing strange in this. Having been at sea before, they know it to be but the signal for a change of watch.

And now they scrutinize the figures and faces freshly presented to their view; after a time seeing that they search for. With a thrill of satisfaction they behold Harry Blew.

He has not come up out of the fore-peak, but from a deck cabin, attached to the caboose. Once outside, he turns toward the quarter, and in ten seconds is beside them.

Rising, they salute him eagerly, affectionately. He bows, touching his hat, and returning their salute. But in speech barely civil, and to them unintelligible.

After which he passes on to the poop-deck, and takes his stand by the helmsman, as if to give the latter directions.

Abashed by the rebuff—for it seems such—won-

dering what it can mean—the girls forsake their seats, and return to the cabin, there to talk over it.

CHAPTER L.

SHARE AND SHARE ALIKE.

In the Condor's fore-castle.

The first watch is on deck, they of the "second dog" having gone down.

To-night Padillo's section holds the first watch; in it Gomez, Hernandez, Velarde, and the two men of nationality unknown. The off watch consists of Striker, Davis, La Crosse, the Dutchman, and Dane. All five are in the fore-castle, the chief mate having retired to his own cabin.

They have been below for some time, and it is now near nine o'clock of the night. The five have finished their suppers, and are seated, some on the sides of their bunks, some on their sea-chests. A large one of the latter, cleated in the center of the floor, does duty as a table. On it is a black bottle containing rum—the sailor's orthodox drink. Before him, or in his hand, each has his pannikin. In every mouth is a pipe, and the fore-castle is full of smoke. A pack of cards is upon the lid of the chest. They are Spanish, as shown by the pictured faces. They lie scattered as if left after play. Not by those sitting around; who, whatever their custom on other nights, on this particular one show no signs of an intention to take them up.

They have that in their minds of more importance than card-playing: money to be made in a less uncertain way. It is a question of equally dividing the spoils of the purposed robbery.

Nothing has yet been said upon the subject, though all are thinking of it. For it has already been before them, informally. During the two days past, Striker has been sounding the crew, one after another. He has communicated his purpose to all; and had their approval of it. The four Spaniards he has not yet approached; but this night intends doing so, as the others insist that an immediate understanding be arrived at and the thing definitely settled.

They are waiting till they on the watch, not required for deck duty, come below. These have had intimation that they will be wanted in the fore-castle; and as the night is fine, with no changing of sails, only the helmsman need absent himself from this mustering of the crew.

There are footsteps on the fore-castle stair, and down come the two sailors not thought worthy of a name.

Soon after Padillo, and Velarde. The second mate is a man over forty years of age, rugged in frame, with bronzed complexion, and the features of a free-booter.

In all, except age, Velarde is not so unlike him. Only of a more slender form, taller, and less brusque in manner.

Padillo, speaking authoritatively, demands to know why they have been summoned to the fore-castle.

Striker, putting himself forward as the spokesman of his party, replies:

"Hain't ye better sit down, master mate? The subject to be discussed may take a start o' time, an' heer it's as cheap sittin' as standin'. Maybe yewon't mind joinin' us in a drink?"

While speaking the ex-convict clutches at the bottle, pours some rum into his pannikin, and offers it to Padillo.

The Spaniard accepting, drinks; and passing the cup to Velarde, sits down. The latter, also drinking, takes a seat; the other sailors having already done the same.

"Now," pursues the second mate, "let's hear what's to be said?"

"Theer be two not yet among us," says Striker. "In coorse one must be at the wheel."

"Gomez is there," responds Velarde.

"Where be Hernandez?"

"I don't know. Likely he is along with Gomez."

"Not much matter," puts in Davis. "I dare say we can settle the thing without either. You begin, Jack, and tell Mr. Padillo and the rest what we've been talkin' about."

"I won't take a very long time to tell it," responds Striker; "nor be there any need for wastin' words. All I've got to say are, that the *swag in this ship sh'd be equally divided*."

Padillo starts, Velarde doing the same.

"What do you mean?" asks the mate, assuming an air of innocence.

"I mean what I've say'd—that the swag sh'd be equally divided."

"And yet I don't understand you."

"Yis, ye do. Come, Master Padillo! 'tain't no use shammin' ignorance—not w' Jack Striker. I be too old a bird to git cheeted w' chaff. If ye wants to throw dust inter my eyes, it must be o' the sort that's stowed away in the cabin lockers—that 'ere gold-dust. Now d'ye understand me?"

Padillo and Velarde look grave. The two nameless sailors show no sign of feeling; both being already apprised of the demand Striker intended to make, and having given their promise to back it.

"Well," says the Spaniard, "you talk of gold-dust in the cabin lockers. And I suppose you know all about it. What then?"

"Only what I've say'd," rejoins the ex-convict. "If ye need, it can be sayed over ag'in. That theer yeller stuff sh'd be measured out to the crew o' this craft, share an' share alike, an' it shall be! Shall an' must!"

"Yes," indorses Davis, with like emphatic affirmation. "Shall and must!"

"The ear, moost it!" adds the Frenchman, followed in the same strain by Dane and Dutchman, also the other two.

"It a'n't no use your stannin' out, masters," continues Striker, addressing himself to the Spaniards.

"Ye see the majority's agane ye; an' in all cases o' the kind, wheresomever I've seen 'em, the majority means the right. Besides, it be right in the job as is afore us. I'm willin' to allow that some o' you chaps hed to do the first plannin' o' it; as also that ye brought the rest o' us in. But what signifies that wheer all ha' got to unnergo a like danger? 'Tain't the beginnin', but the eend that's o' importance; the which consarns ev'ry one o' us the same. For this thing, we stan' a good chance o' gettin' our necks stretched; therefore, we sh'd all hev a ekal reward for runnin' the risk. Ay! an' theer be one who's coomed in later'n any o' us, who'll be claimin' a share. Him, I dare say, nobody 'll object to. His joinin' us 'll make the job eazier to do; besides,

it may save complicashun in the full crew bein' unanimous. He mote 'a' gi'ed us trouble by stannin' apart."

"Who are you speaking of?" demanded Padillo. "I needn't tell ye," responds Striker. "Theer be the man to speak for himself!"

At the words a footstep is heard on the stair. A pair of legs is seen descending; after them a body—the body of Harry Blew!

Padillo looks aghast, Velarde the same. Both believe their conspiracy discovered, their scheme blown, and that Striker with his talk has been deceiving them. They expect nothing else than to be set upon, and put in irons. For this purpose the first officer has entered the fore-castle.

They are soon undeceived, on hearing what he has to say. Striker draws it out, repeating the conversation passed, and the demand that has been made.

Thus Harry Blew gives rejoinder:

"I'm with ye, shipmates, to the end, be that sweet or bitter. Striker talks straight; an' his seems the only fair way of settlin' the question. The majority must decide. There's two not here, an' they've got to be consulted—one's at the wheel, and belike the other's along with him. Let's all go aft and talk to them. No danger now; the skipper's asleep, and we've got the ship to ourselves."

So saying, he leads up the ladder; the rest starting from their seats and following.

Once on deck they cluster around the fore-hatch, and there stand in conference, the first mate having still something to say.

The second leaving them skulks aft under shadow.

Soon the others go the same way in a string, which again compacts into a crowd as they step upon the quarter.

There they again stop, when the moonlight falling upon their faces betrays the expression of men in mutiny.

But mutiny unopposed. On the quarter-deck no one meets them. The traitorous first mate has spoken truly. The captain is asleep; they have the ship to themselves.

CHAPTER LI.

GOMEZ AND HERNANDEZ.

THERE are two men at the wheel, one steering, the other standing idly beside.

It is Gil Gomez who has hold of the spokes, the idler being Hernandez. Both are youngish men, neither above thirty. Both are of sallow complexion, and bearded; one black and the other reddish brown. Neither has mustaches; only whiskers grown well forward on their cheeks, and around their throats. So luxuriant as to conceal the greater part of their features; that seem shapely enough. It is difficult to tell their figures dressed as they are in coarse sailor toggery, widely cut, and hanging loosely around their bodies. Both are of medium height—of the two, Gomez taller and more robust.

On the heads of each is a sou'-wester hat; that of Gomez slouching over a pair of eyes that sparkle with a fierce light, and a glance that betrays determination, with the will of one accustomed to command. Though acting as one of the common crew, he is beyond doubt chief of the party that has conspired to plunder the ship; in all matters relating to this the second mate giving way to him. On several occasions since coming aboard, his ascendancy has been seen by Striker and the other sailors. Besides, it was Gomez who engaged them, giving such hints about what he expected them to do, as were necessary to secure their consent to doing it. All knew their duty would be very different from that of ordinary ship's work. Ten thousand dollars for less than a month's service, was pay too unprecedented to escape suspicion.

Nor did the *entrepreneur* leave it to this. While promising it, he took promise in return that the recipients of such big booty should bear a hand in whatever they should be called on to do.

The crew so shipped were not men to stick at trifles; and most stepped aboard the Chilean barque prepared for piracy, or murder if need be.

Since becoming acquainted with the particulars of the scheme in which they are to assist, they do not back out of it. They are still ready to do the deed; only under changed conditions.

Gomez, at the wheel, is not yet aware of the strike that has taken place. Though during the day he had heard some whisper of, and is half-expecting it. Hernandez also.

It is not about this they are now conversing, but a theme altogether different. Beauty, not booty, is the subject of their discourse, which is carried on in a tone loud enough to be heard by any one near. Their comrades are in the forward part of the vessel; or below in the fore-peak; the skipper is asleep in his cabin, Don Gregorio in his, the lady passengers in theirs.

It is about these last the two are talking. And in terms that for sailors might seem strange; rough, ribald men bandying free speech, and making familiar remarks about two delicate, high-born dames, such as Carmen Montijo and Inez Alvarez!

Not strange to one acquainted with the designs of Gil Gomez and Jose Hernandez; too intelligible with a knowledge of their intentions, which is not only to rob Don Gregorio Montijo of his riches, but to take away his life; afterward to carry off and appropriate, one of them his daughter, the other his granddaughter!

Such is their fixed determination—has been from the first.

Their pretensions, apart from the scheme of plunder, have been hitherto unopposed by their fellow-conspirators. All seem tacitly to have admitted their having some right, since no one has disputed or questioned it.

It may be that no one cares; that with the rest of the ruffian crew the greed of gold absorbs all other passions, leaving no place for love or any such tender sentiment.

It is different with the two men at the wheel, more especially with him who is steering. On the day when Carmen Montijo first stepped on the Condor's deck, the eyes of Gil Gomez were seen riveted upon her, like one who had given way to a fixed fascination. Since, he has not seen her, till this same day; but again were his glances upon her, like those of the deadly *cascabel* bent alluringly on the bird; or that disguised serpent in the Garden of Eden gazing on the mother of mankind.

Hernandez at the same time keeping Inez Alvarez

under his eye; admiring in like manner, though perhaps in a weaker way.

It is he who asks:

"How shall we manage, once we've got them ashore?"

"How! Marry them of course. That's what I mean doing with the beautiful Dona Carmen. Don't you intend the same with Dona Inez?"

"Of course, if I can."

"Can? There need be no difficulty about it."

"I hope not; though I think there will, and a good deal—there must be, *amigo*."

"In what way?"

"Suppose they don't give their consent? And it's not likely they'll do that."

"A fig for their consent! We shall force it! Come, *camarado*! don't let that scare you. Whether consenting or not, we'll have a marriage ceremony or the form of one, all the same. I can fix that, or I'm much mistaken about the place we're going to, and the sort of men we may expect to meet there. When I last looked on Santiago de Veragua, bidding adieu to a town rather pleasant, I left behind a few old familiars, who are not likely to have forgotten this sinner, though long years have rolled by since—some that will still continue to do me a service, especially with the means I've got to command it. If the Padre Padierna be still above ground, he'll marry me to Carmen Montijo without asking her any questions, or caring what answer she may make. It's now nine years since I saw the worthy monk, and he may have kicked up his sandaled soles long ago. Though that's not likely. He was a tough old sinner, and knew how to take care of himself. However, it won't matter much. If he's gone dead, I've got another string to my bow, in the young cura Gonzaga, who, in my time, had charge of souls in a *pueblito* nearer the place where I hope we may be able to make landing. He may have risen to be a grand church dignitary since then. Whether or not, I've no fear of his forgetting old times, when he and I used to go shares in certain smuggling adventures. Ay, and something besides. So you perceive, *mio amigo*, we're not drifting toward a desert coast, inhabited only by savages; but one where we'll find all the means and appliances of civilization, among them a priest, ready and willing to do us that little bit of ecclesiastical service without asking awkward questions, or caring a *claco* for consequences. Neither the monk nor cura I've spoken of, will trouble their consciences on that score so long as it's me; more especially after I've shown them the stuff with which our pockets will be so well lined. If neither of my old acquaintances turn up we'll find plenty of priests willing to tie the knot that should make us happy on earth or give us a passport to heaven, if that pleases us better. I tell you, *hombre*, we're steering toward civilized shores."

"*Carraño!* that is civilization! the sort we stand in need of."

"We'll find it in Santiago, and more of the same sort, rest assured. Once in the Veraguan capital, with these women as our wives, and they not able to question our calling them so, we can enter society without fear. So far as that of Santiago is concerned, we might take them into it under a different title, if they themselves were consenting and agreeable. But, as they're not likely to be so, then we must both become Benedicts."

"Well, that's what we both want."

"Not so much now; not both of us," answers Gomez, with a sardonic grin, giving an emphasis to his speech, only to himself intelligible. "Time was when I wanted marriage. Now the *senorita*, whom I intend turning into a *senora*, would stand a chance of being made something different, but for circumstances in her favor. Yours the same, and I suppose you've been calculating in the same way. At the death of Don Gregorio his daughter becomes owner of some property she's heir to in Spain, and as her husband I intend helping her to spend the inheritance. Only as such can I secure it. Your girl has already got property in the same place."

"*Carraño!*" exclaims he who has set his heart upon Inez Alvarez. "I know that; and yet don't care so much about it. To speak truth, I'm madly in love with the girl, and honestly want her for my wife. I shall feel as if in heaven when I become the husband of Inez Alvarez."

"Say her master; as I mean to be of Carmen Montijo. *Por Dios!* when I've once got her in my power, I'll teach her submission. The haughty dame will learn what is to be a wife. And if not an obedient one, then, by the Virgin, she shall have divorce; that is in time, after I'm tired, and have squeezed all the sweetness out of her—I mean that piece of property that awaits her in old Spain."

On pronouncing this speech, the countenance of the speaker shows an expression that Satan himself might be proud of.

It could not be more Satanic. It foreshadows a sad fate for Carmen Montijo.

CHAPTER LII. CASTLES IN SPAIN.

For some time there is silence between the two conspirators at the wheel. Breaking it, Hernandez says:

"I don't like the idea of putting the old gentleman to death. Is there no other way we can dispose of him?"

"Bah, *hombre!*" you're always harping on the strings of humanity. Striking discordant sounds. There's no other way by which we can be safe. If we let him live, he'd be sure to turn up somewhere, and tell a tale that would get both our throats grappled by the *garota*. The women might do the same if we didn't make wives of them. Once that, and we can show our marriage certificates, their words will go for naught. Besides, having full marital powers, we can take precautions against any scandal. Don Gregorio has got to die. The skipper, too, and that rough fellow, the first mate, with the old black-amoor to boot."

"*Maldita!* I don't feel up to all that. It will be murder."

"Nothing of the sort; only drowning. They can be tied before we clear out the ship. Then they'll go down with her. By the time she sinks you'll be far off, and won't either see or hear any thing to give your tender heart a horror."

"The thought of it would be enough."

"But how is it to be helped? If they're allowed to live, we'd never be out of danger. May be you'd

like to abandon the thing altogether, and resign thought of ever having the Andalusian in your arms?"

"There you mistake, *amigo*. Sooner than that I'd do the killing myself. Ay, kill her rather than that she should get away from me."

"Now you're talking sense! But see! What's up yonder?"

The interrogatory comes from Gomez seeing a group of men assembled on the fore-deck alongside the hatch.

The sky, cloudless, with a full moon overhead, shows it to compose nearly if not all the Condor's crew.

The light also displays them in earnest gesticulation, while their voices, borne aft, tell of some subject seriously debated.

What can it be? They of the second dog-watch, long since relieved, should be asleep in their bunks. Why have they come on deck?

It is a surprise to the two at the wheel.

And while engaged in mutual interrogation, they perceive the second mate coming aft, as also that he makes approach in a hurried, yet stealthy manner.

"What is it?" asks Gomez.

"A strike," answers Padillo. "A mutiny among the men we engaged to assist us."

"On what ground?"

"They've got to know all about the gold—even to its exact quantity."

"Indeed! And what's their demand?"

"That we shall share it with them. They say they'll have it so."

"*Maldemonios!*"

"The old *ladron*, Striker, began it. But, what will surprise you, the first mate knows all and's gone in along with them. He's now at their head, and insisting on the same. They swear if we don't divide equally, the strongest will take what they can. I've stolen aft to ask you what we'd best do."

"They're determined are they?"

"To the death—they say so."

"In that case," says Gomez, after a second or two spent in reflection, "I suppose we'll have to yield to their demands. I see no help for it. But, go back, Padillo, and say something to pacify them. Try to put things off till we get time to consider. *Maldita!* this is an unexpected affair; ugly as the devil."

Padillo is about to return to their discontented shipmates on the forward deck. He is saved the trouble by seeing them come aft. They do not hesitate to invade the sacred precincts of the quarter. For they have no fear of being forbidden.

Soon they mount to the poop-deck and cluster around the wheel; the whole Condor's crew now present, mates as well as men, all save the captain and cook.

And all take part in the colloquy that succeeds, either by speech or ejaculation.

The debate is short, and the question in dispute is soon decided.

Harry Blew, backed by the ex-convict, talks with determination, Striker swearing emphatically. The others, with interests identical, stand by the two chief speakers, backing them up with exclamations of assent.

"Shipmates," says Harry Blew, "this gold should be equally divided among us all."

"Must be," adds Striker—"share an' share alike. It's the only fair way, an' the only one we'll gi'e in to."

"Stick to that, Striker," cries Davis; "we'll stan' by yer."

"Certainement vat for no? *Sacre Dieu!* ve vill, pegar! I am for les droits de l'homme—le droit de democratie. Vive le fair play!"

Dane and Dutchman, with the other two sailors, speak in the same strain.

The Spaniards, perceiving themselves in a minority—one, too, that threatens unpleasant consequences, at length yield, and declare their consent to an equal division of the spoils, after which the men belonging to the off-watch return to the fore-castle, and there betake themselves to their bunks, while the others scatter themselves about the ship.

Gil Gomez remains at the wheel, his "trick" not yet being over, Hernandez beside him. For a time the two are silent, their brows shadowed with gloom. It is not pleasant to lose \$200,000, and this have they lost within the last ten minutes, by sharing equally. Still there is a reflection to soothe them both having bright skies ahead.

Gomez first returning to think of them, says:

"Never mind, *amigo*. There will be money enough for present purposes all the same. And for the future we can both build on a good sure foundation."

"What?"

"Castles in Spain!"

CHAPTER LIII. "LAND HO!"

The cry comes from a man stationed on the fore-topmast cross-trees of the Condor.

Since sunrise he has been aloft on the look-out for land, and has just sighted it.

Captain Lautanas is not quite certain of what land it is. He knows it is the Veraguan coast, but as yet does not recognize the particular part.

Noon coming soon after, with a clear, unclouded sky, enables him to catch the sun in its meridian passage, and make sure of a good sight. This gives him for latitude, 7 deg. 20 min. N. The chronometer has furnished him with his longitude 82 deg. 12 min. W.

As the Chilean skipper is a skilled observer, and has confidence in the observations he has made, the land in sight should be the Island of *Cuba*, or an islet that covers it, called *Hicaron*. Both are off the Coast of Veragua, westward from Panama Bay, and about a hundred miles from its mouth. Into this the Chilean barque is seeking to make entrance.

Having ciphered out his noon reckoning, the skipper enters it in his log. "LAT. 7 deg. 20 min. N.; LONG. 82 deg. 12 min. W. WIND W. S. W. LIGHT BREEZE."

While penning these slight memoranda, little dreams Captain Lautanas how important they may one day become. The night before, while taking an observation of the stars, could he have read them astrologically, he might have discovered many a chance against his ever making another entry in the log-book of the Condor.

A wind west-sou'-west is favorable for entering

the Bay of Panama. A ship steering round Cabo Mala, once she has weathered this much-dreaded headland, will have it on her starboard quarter. But the Condor, coming down the coast from north, has it nearly abeam, and Captain Lautanas, perceiving that he has run a little too near the coast, cries out to the man at the wheel:

"Put the helm down! Keep well off the land!"

Saying this, he lights a cigarrito; for a moment amuses himself with his pets; and then, ascending to the poop-deck, enters into conversation with more refined company—his lady passengers. These, with Don Gregorio, have gone up some time before, and stand on the port side gazing on the land, and joyfully; it is the first they have seen for several weeks—indeed since leaving California. The voyage has been somewhat wearisome, for the Condor has encountered adverse gales, to say nothing of time spent in traversing more than three thousand miles of trackless ocean waste.

The sight of land, with the thought of soon setting foot on it, makes all gleeful: and Captain Lautanas adds to this by assuring them that in less than twenty-four hours he will enter the Bay of Panama, and in twenty-four after, bring his barque alongside the wharf of that ancient port so oft pillaged by the buccaners. It is scarcely a damper when he adds, "wind and weather permitting," for the sky is of sapphire-blue, and the wind wafting them in the right direction.

After staying an hour or so on deck, indulging in cheerful conversation, the tropic sun becoming intensely hot, drives them down to the cabins, there to seek shade, and take *siesta*, the habit of all Spanish-Americans.

The Chilean skipper is also accustomed to have his afternoon nap. There is no reason for his remaining on deck. He has determined his reckoning, and set the Condor on her course. Sailing in such a calm sea, he may go to sleep without anxiety on his mind. And leaving his second mate in charge—the first being off watch—he descends to the cabin, and enters his own sleeping-room, on the starboard side.

Before lying down, he summons the cook, and gives orders for a dinner, to be dressed in the best style the Condor's stores can furnish. It is in celebration of their having sighted land.

Then stretching himself along a sofa, he is soon slumbering profoundly, as one with nothing on his conscience to keep him awake. For a time the Condor's decks seem deserted; no one is seen save the helmsman, and the second mate by his side. The sailors not on duty have betaken themselves to the fore-castle, and lie loling in their bunks, while those of the working-watch, with no work to do, have sought shady corners to escape from the tropic sun. It is disagreeably hot, for the breeze has been gradually dying away, and is now so light that the vessel scarce makes steerage-way.

The only movement is that made by the two monkeys, to whom the hot sun seems congenial. These chase one another along the decks, accompanying their grotesque gestures by cries in correspondence—a hoarse gibbering that sounds with weird strangeness throughout the ship.

Except this, every thing is silent. There is no surging of waves; no rush through the rigging, no whistling against the sails; every now and then a drop of one blown back. The breeze has fallen to a "light air," and the Condor, with full canvas spread, and all studding-sails out, is scarce making two knots an hour. This, too, with the wind upon her quarter. There is nothing strange about the barque making so little way, but what is strange is the direction in which it is now striking her. It is upon the starboard quarter, instead of the beam as it should be, and as Captain Lautanas left it. Since his going below the wind has not shifted a single point, therefore the ship must have changed her course. Beyond doubt she has done this, the steersman having put the helm up instead of down, causing her to draw closer to the land, in direct contradiction to the order received by him.

Is it ignorance on his part? No, it can not be. Gil Gomez is at the wheel, and he should know how to handle it. Besides, Padillo is standing by, and the second mate, whatever his moral qualities, is a fairly-skilled seaman. He can not fail to notice that the barque is standing too much in shore. Why does he not see to the directions of the captain being carried out? Because he does not desire them to be so, or intend that the Condor's keel shall ever cut the waters of Panama Bay. The words passing between him and Gomez tell why the helm has gone up instead of down, and also that the latter, not the former, has been first in disobeying the order.

"You know the coast in there?" says Padillo, pointing to land seen on the port side.

"Every mile of it—at least, sufficient to make sure of a place where we can put ashore. That headland rising on the port bow is Punta Marieta. We must stand so as not to round it before evening. If we did, the breeze, blowing off shore, would give us trouble; to get back we must hug close, and keep under shelter of the land. With this light wind we won't make much way before nightfall; then in the darkness, when they're below at dinner, we can put about, and run along until we can find a good landing-place."

"So far as being looked after by Lautanas we need have no fear; to-day the cabin dinner is to be a grand spread. I overheard his orders to that effect. He intends making things pleasant for his passengers before parting with them. As a matter of course he'll keep below all night and get fuddled to boot, which may spare us more trouble. It looks like luck, doesn't it?"

"Not much matter about that," rejoins Gomez. "The thing'll have to end all the same. Only, as you say, Lautanas staying below will make it easier, and save some unpleasant scenes in the way of spilling blood. After dinner the *senoritas* are sure to come on deck. They've done so every night, and I hope they won't make this an exception. If Don Gregorio and the skipper stay below—"

"Hush! that's them now, coming up the cabin stairs. Here they are—both."

The dialogue is interrupted by the speakers seeing Captain Lautanas step onto the quarter-deck, followed by his passengers.

It would have been interrupted without this, for at the same instant eight bells are sounded, summoning the first dog-watch to its duty.

Harry Blew takes charge, Striker relieving Gomez

at the wheel; but before resigning it, before Captain Lautanas has shown his head above the combing of the cabin companionway, Gomez gives a strong pull of the spokes, putting the helm hard down, and brings the barque's head up, so that the wind strikes full upon her beam.

"Maldita! Mil dem nios!"

It is the gentle Chilean skipper who thus profanely exclaims. For he has received a shock of surprise, enough not only to excite but make him exceedingly angry.

Soon as setting his foot on deck he has looked over the sea. And shoreward, toward land in sight. Just ahead then over port side, and again forward in the direction of the Condor's course.

What sees he there? A high promontory stretching out into the ocean, which at a glance he identifies as Punta Marieta. He knows the headland well; but he also knows it should not be just there, almost butting against the bows of his ship.

"Que diablo!" he again exclaims, rubbing his eyes to make sure they are not deceiving him, then following the exclamation with an inquiry addressed to the helmsman:

"What does this mean, sir? You've been keeping too close in shore. The very contrary to what I commanded."

Then rushing aft to the wheel, he again orders: "Helm down!"

Striker obeys and puts the "helm down," bringing the barque close to the wind as she can bear.

Then the skipper, turning angrily upon him, demands to know why the mistake has been made?

The ex-convict, himself not comprehending why, answers in the same strain. In blunt speech he tells Captain Lautanas the truth—that he has just taken the spokes in hand, and knows nothing of what has been done before. He is keeping the Condor on the same course she was on when he took her from the last steersman.

"Who was it?" thunders the skipper.

"Gil Gomez," gruffly replies Striker.

"Yes, it was he," says the first-mate, who has come aft along with the captain. "The afternoon watch was Padillo's, and Gomez had the last trick at the wheel."

"Where is he?" asks the skipper, still surprised and excited.

"Gone forward; he's down in the fore-castle!"

"Call him up! Send him to me!"

A sailor glides forward along the gangway, and soon returns, Gomez along with him. The latter meets the gaze of Captain Lautanas with a look sullen and threatening disobedience.

"How is this?" asks the Chilean. "You had the wheel during the last watch. Where have you been running to?"

"In the course you commanded, Captain Lautanas."

"That can't be, sir. If you'd kept her on as I'd set her, that land wouldn't have been there, lying almost below our cutwater. I understand my chart too well to have made such a mistake."

"I don't know anything about your chart," sulkily rejoins Gomez. "All I know is that I kept the barque's head as directed. If she hasn't answered to it that's no fault of mine, and I don't much like being told that it is."

The puzzled skipper again rubs his eyes, and takes a fresh look at the land. He is as much mystified as ever.

Still the mistake may have been his own, and, as the relieved steersman appears confident it is, he dismisses him without further parley or reprimand.

Seeing that there will be no difficulty in yet clearing the point, his anger has cooled down, and he is but too glad to escape from an *imbroglio*, so averse to his pacific disposition.

Soon the Condor, hauled close to the wind, regains her lost weatherway; sufficient for the doubling of Punta Marieta. And before the last bells of the second dog-watch are sounded she is in a fair way of weathering the cape.

The difficulty has been removed by the wind veering suddenly round to the opposite point of the compass. For it is now near night, and the land breeze has commenced blowing off shore.

Well acquainted with the coast, and noting the change of wind, the Chilean skipper knows that all danger is passed. With confidence and restored cheerfulness he returns to the cabin to rejoin his fair passengers, and preside at the dinner table, which on their account is this day to be so richly and proudly provided.

CHAPTER LIV.

PANAMA OR SANTIAGO?

THREE bells of the second dog-watch are sounding as Captain Lautanas goes down to take his seat at the dinner-table. Shortly after his disappearance from the quarter-deck the sailors are seen assembling on the fore.

Soon they become grouped around the manger-board, close up to the knight-heads.

The gathering comprises the whole crew—mates and men; all except him having charge of the helm. It is one of the nameless sailors who is now steering.

By the time all these get together it is eight o'clock, and the dog-watch ends. This night no bell announces its termination; nor is any struck to summon the first watch on deck. They are there already in contemplation of a deed very different from their ordinary duties. For the muster round the manger-board has reference to their scheme of plunder now nearing the hour of execution.

The general plan is already before them; understood and agreed to. They have only to deliberate about the final details.

Considering the dire scoundrelism of their design, it is painful to see the first mate, Harry Blew, in their midst. An American sailor, better might be expected of him, to say nothing of an old man-o-war's-man. But he is there; and not only taking part with them, but apparently acting as their leader. His speech too clearly shows him to be chief of the conspiring crew. His actions also ever since the day when he signified his desire to join them. After entering into the conspiracy, he has shown an assiduity worthy of a better cause. His first act in backing up Striker for an equal division of the booty gave him *credit*; and the zeal since displayed by him has increased his popularity, so that he now holds first

place among the pirates, the greater number acknowledging his authority.

If Edward Crozier could but see him now, he would never more have faith in human gratitude. Thinking of Carmen Montijo, the young officer has doubted woman without reason; witnessing the behavior of Harry Blew he might curse man with good cause.

Well for the recreant sailor, Crozier is not present to see and hear him. If he were, there would be quick death to a traitor.

The young officer is far away, a thousand miles of trackless ocean between—little dreaming of the design that threatens her to whom he has given his heart and promised hand. While Harry Blew is standing in the midst of men plotting ruin to her and hers!

Oh, man! Oh, American sailor! Where is your gratitude? What has become of your honor—your oath? The first gone, the second disregarded, the last lewdly broken!

Soon as together the pirates enter upon a discussion; the question being about the place where they should land. Upon this point there is difference of opinion. Some are for going ashore at once, on the coast in sight. Others want to run on till they enter Panama Bay.

At the head of those in favor of the latter course is the chief mate, who gives his reasons thus:

"By running up into the Bay o' Panyma we'll get closer to the town, and it'll be easier to reach it after we've set foot ashore. Now, Panyma bein' a seaport, and plenty o' vessels sailin' from it, we'll be able to go, every man his own way. Them as wants can cross over the Isthmus, an' off on t'other side. An' Panama bein' a bigish place, besides now full o' strangers goin' to Californy, an' some comin' back, we'd be less likely to get noticed in the crowd. While if we land on the coast here, where there ain't no good-sized town, but only some bit o' fishin' village or the like, we'd be a marked lot, an' run the risk o' bein' took up an' put into one o' thar prisins. Just possible, too, we might land on some part that's inhabited by wild Indiyans, an' lose not only the shinin' stuff, but our scalps. I've heard say thar's the worst lot o' savages livin' along the coast here. An' supposin' we should meet neither Indiyans nor whites, but find we'd chanced ashore in a wilderness covered w' wood, we might have trouble in makin' our way anywhere. Them thick forests o' the tropics ain't so easy to travel through. I've know'd o' sailors as were cast away perishin' in one afore they could reach any settlement o' civilization. My advice, shipmates, is for us to take the barque on into the bay, an' when we've got near enough the port, to make sure o' bein' able to reach, then lower our boat, an' put in for the shore; Panyma Bay's big enough to give us plenty choice o' places for what we intend o' doin'."

"We've heard you out, Mr. Blew," rejoins Gomez. "Now let me say in answer, you haven't given a single reason for going up the bay that mightn't stand good for doing the very opposite. But there's one worth all you have mentioned, and it's against you. While running into Panama Bay we may meet a score of other vessels coming out; we'd be almost sure to do that. And supposing one of them to be a man-of-war—a British or American cruiser say—and she takes it into her head to overhaul us, where will we be then?"

"An' if they did, what need for us to be afeard? Seein' that the Condor's papers are all ship-shape, they'd have to leave us as they found us. Let them overhaul an' be blowed!"

"They mightn't leave us as they found us, for all that. As the time when they took it into their heads to board the barque might be just that when we would be leaving her. How then? Besides, other ships would have the chance of spying us in that critical moment. As I've said, your other arguments are wrong, and I'll answer them in detail. But first let me tell you all, I've got a pretty accurate knowledge of the coast all along here. I ought to have, considering that I spent several years on and off it, in business which goes by the name of contraband. Now, all around the shores of Panama Bay, there's just the sort of forest-covered country Mr. Blew talks about getting strayed in. We might land within twenty miles of the port, and yet not be able to reach it without the greatest difficulty. Danger, too, from the savages our chief mate seems so afraid of. Whereas by putting ashore anywhere along here we won't be far from the old Nicaraguan road that runs all through the Isthmus. It will take us to the town of Panama, any that wish to go there. But there's another town as big as it, and better for our purpose, one wherein we'll be less likely to meet the unpleasant experiences of being arrested and imprisoned, not to speak of something still more disagreeable. The place I'm speaking of is Santiago, the capital of Veragua, which isn't over four days' journey from the coast. And we can get to it by an easy road. But that's not the thing of greatest importance. What most concerns us is the safety of the place we steer to. I can answer for the old town of Santiago. Unless customs have changed since I used to trifle away some time there, and people too, we'll find some fellows who'll show hospitality. With the money at our disposal—ay, the tenth part of it, I could buy up the *alcaldes* of the town, and every judge in the province of Veragua."

"That's the sort of place for us—the very place!" exclaims a chorus of voices. "Let us steer for Santiago!"

"We'll have to put about, and run along the coast till we find a fit place for landing."

"Yes," rejoins Harry Blew, speaking satirically, and as if exasperated by the majority going against him. "An' if we put about here, we'll stand a good chance o' going slap on them rocks. Thar's a line o' breakers all along shore far's I can see. How's any boat to be got through them? She'd be bilged to a sartin'ity."

"There's breakers, as you say," admits Gomez, "but their line doesn't run all along. I remember many openings where either boat or ship can safely pass through. We must look out for one of them."

"Vaya camarados!" exclaims the second mate; "we are wasting time which just now is valuable. Let's put the barque about, and stand along the coast of Veragua. That's what Gil Gomez proposes, and I second it. If you like we can put it to a vote."

"No need; we're all agreed to it."

"Yes; all of us."

"Well, shipmates," says Harry Blew, seeing himself obliged to give way, and conceding the point as gracefully as possible, "if you're all in favor o' landin' along here, I ain't goin' to stand out against it, since it's all the same to me—only I thought, and still think, we'd be better by runnin' into Panyma Bay."

"No, no; Santiago's the place for us—we've decided to go there."

"Then to Santiago let's go. An' if the barque's to be put about, I tell ye there's no time to be lost, otherwise we'll go sure into them breakers. As yit, I dare say we can manage to scrape clear o' them, the more likely as the wind's been shiftin' an's now off shore. It'll be a close shave for all that."

"Plenty of sea-room," says the second mate. "Let's about ship at once!"

"You see to it, Padillo!" directs Gomez, who, from his success in having his counsel adopted, seems all at once to claim command.

The second mate glides aft, and going to the helmsman, whispered a word or two in his ear.

Instantly the helm goes up, and the barque, paying off, wears round from east to west-nor'-west.

The sailors at the same time brace round her yards, and trim her sails for the altered course, executing the maneuver, not as is usual, with a chorusing chant, but silently, and as if the ship were a specter, and the ghosts composing her crew.

CHAPTER LV.

GETTING READY FOR ACTION.

SOON as the Condor stands on her changed course, her crew re-assembles on the fore-deck, to concert further measures for carrying out their scheme.

It is already understood that they are to run along the coast till they discover a gap in the line of coral reef, which causes breakers. This found they will lower a boat, then scuttling the barque, and abandoning her, tow themselves ashore.

The first part of this programme is now in progress, the clear moonlight favoring its execution. They are standing along shore in a course parallel to its trend. A dark band between sea and sky denotes the facade of a bold, rocky cliff, continuous along the horizon. Here and there it rises into hills, one seen ahead having the dimensions of a mountain.

The barque is about a league's distance from land; and half-way between, the breakers show their white crests, their roar sounding ominously through the calm quiet of the night.

The vessel making but little way—only two or three knots an hour—it is proposed that the boat be let down at once, and everything put into her. On such a tranquil sea it will tow alongside in perfect safety.

As this will be so much work in advance, the measure is approved of; and the men, scattering, proceed to its execution.

The pinnace is selected as the most suitable boat for beaching. Forming in a row by its side, two leap lightly into it, insert the plug, ship the rudder, receive oar and boat-hooks, clear the life-lines, and cast off the lanyards of the gribes. The others holding the fall-tackles in hand, see that they are clear for running. Then taking a proper time, they lower away.

As soon as the boat's bottom touches the water, the two men in it, hauling upon the painter, whose loose end has been left on board, bring the boat abeam, and make fast under a set of man-ropes already let over the side.

Other movements follow; the men passing to and fro between the fore-castle and companionway, carrying canvas bags, their sea-kits, bundles of clothes, and such other of their belongings as they deem necessary for a debarkation like that intended. Some loose provisions, with a "beaker" of water, are also brought, and handed down into the boat; also a keg containing rum, and a basket with bottles of wine.

The miscellaneous providing is not meant for a voyage; only a stock to serve for the night, which they will have to spend upon the beach, or some spot contiguous, with a surplus for the land-journey, to be commenced in the morning.

In silence, but with no great show of stealth, are all these movements made. They have but little fear of being detected, and some scarce care if they be. The only danger is from the darky, and this not much. After dressing the dinner and serving it, he has ceased to act as cook, and now performing the *melier* of steward, keeps nearly all his time in the cabin, waiting on the guests at table. Only at long intervals is he seen on deck, and then staying but a short time.

While he is up, the pirates suspend operations, and stand innocently idle, resuming them as he again goes below.

Over an hour is spent in these insidious preparations, which are at length complete. Everything has been got into the boat, except that which is to form its most precious freight.

And now the piratical crew again come together to consult about the final step, for the time to take it is rapidly drawing nigh.

It is one so serious as to make the most hardened among them shrink from taking the initiative, for it is the disposal of those destined as the victims of their villainy.

The general intention is understood by all, and has been tacitly determined already. The senioritas are to be seized, and taken on shore; the other three to be dealt with in a different way.

About the abduction there is no difference of opinion; the scoundrels are unanimous. Willing or not, the girls must go with them, whither or for what purpose, no one has yet named. Only, there is a tacit understanding that they are to go with Gomez and Hernandez, these two having all along shown a predilection, and asserted a claim which none of the others have disputed.

How to deal with Don Gregorio, the skipper and cook, is deemed a more delicate question, since these are to be disposed of in a way that comes home to the conscience of those who have such.

For a time they stand silent, waiting for some one to summon courage to speak. There is one who can do this, a ruffian of unmitigated type, in whose breast stirs not the slightest throb of humanity. It is the second mate, Padillo.

Breaking silence, he says:

"Let us cut their throats, and have done with it."

Despite its laconicism, and the hardened auditory to whom it is addressed, the horrid proposal does not find favorable response. Several speak in opposition. Harry Blew first, and loudest. Despite his broken word and forfeited faith, the old man-o'-war's-man is not so abandoned as to contemplate murder thus coolly. Some of those around him may have already committed this crime; but he does not yet feel up to it.

Opposing Padillo's counsel, he says:

"What need for our killin' them? For my part I don't see any."

"And for your part what would you do?" sneeringly retorts the second mate.

"Give the poor devils a chance for their lives, an' let 'em go."

"How let them go?" asks Davis.

"Why, set the barque's head to sea. As the wind's off the shore she'd soon carry them beyond sight o' land, an' we'd never hear another word about 'em."

"No, no! that won't do," protest several, in the same breath. "They might get picked up, and we'd hear too much about them."

"Curra!" ironically exclaims Padillo, "that would be a wise proceeding! Just the way to get our throats in the *garota*. You forget that Don Gregorio Montijo is a man of the big grandee kind. And should he ever set foot ashore, after this, he'd have influence enough to make every spot of earth too hot to hold us. There's an old adage about dead men telling no tales. Maybe some of you know it to be a true one? Take my advice, *camarados*, and let us act up to it. What's your opinion, Senor Gomez?"

"My opinion," responds Gomez, now speaking for the first time, "is that there's no need for any difference in yours. Mr. Blew's against the spilling of blood, and so am I. Still we can't let them off as he counsels. That would be something more than madness; it might be suicide. Still I see no necessity for a cold cutting of throats. There is a way between I'd recommend, that'll spare us doing so."

"What way?" demand several voices. "Tell us, Gil Gomez!"

"Oh! it's simple enough; you must all have thought of it, as well as I. Of course we intend sinking the ship. She's not likely to go down till we're a long way off—in all likelihood out of sight. We can leave them on board, and let them go quietly down along with her."

To this humane compromise several signify their assent; more swayed by its cleverness than its humanity.

Not so Padillo; the inhuman monster, to whom killing seems congenial, sticks to his text and makes reply by repeating his proposal.

"How are we to help it?" he asks, with an air of *mitate*, under the circumstances ludicrous. "The skipper will be sure to resist, and so will the old Don. What then? We'll be compelled to cut their throats, knock them on the head, or pitch them overboard. For my part I don't see the object of making such bother about it. I still say, let's slip their wind at once."

"Dash it, man!" cries Striker, hitherto only a listener, "you Spanish chaps 'pear to hev a ugly way o' doin' bizness in a job o' this sort. In the Australian bush we ar'n't so bloodthirsty. When's we stick up a chap there, so long's he don't cut up nasty, we settle things by splicin' him to a tree, an' leavin' him to his meditations. Why can't we do the same w' the skipper an' the Don, supposin' 'em to show refractory?"

"That's it!" exclaims Davis, indorsing Striker's proposal. "My old chum's got the right idea of sich things. Let's do as he says!"

"Beside," continues the ex-convict, "this bizness seems to me simple enough. We want the swag, an' some may want the weemen. Well, we can get both 'thout the necessity o' doin' murder. As Gomez say, let 'em go down w' the ship."

Striker's remonstrance seems strange—under the circumstances, serio-comic.

"What might you call murder?" mockingly asks Padillo. "Is there any difference between their getting drowned and having their breath stopped by a blow? Not much to them, I take it; and no more to us. If there's to be a distinction, it's so small I can't see it. *Curramba!* no!"

"Whether you see it or not, then," interferences Harry Blew, "Striker's right; an' for myself, as I've already said, I object to spillin' blood, when the thing isn't absolutely necessary. By leavin' 'em aboard they may get drowned, as you say, Senor Padillo; but it'll keep our hands clear o' the red murder."

"That's true!" shout several. "Let's take the Australian way of it, and tie them up."

The assenting voices are nearly unanimous, and Striker's compromise is carried.

Thus far every thing is determined. It only remains to talk of some details of action, and apportion to every one his part.

For this very few words suffice. It is arranged that the first mate, assisted by Davis, a sort of ship's carpenter, shall see to the scuttling of the vessel.

Gomez and Hernandez are to take charge of the girls, and get them into the boat, as they best can; while Padillo is to head the party intrusted with the seizing and stowage of the gold.

In fine the hellish plan is complete, and the moment of action near.

CHAPTER LVI.

AROUND THE DINNER-TABLE.

In the cabin of the Condor.

It is a snug little saloon, such as is often found on trading vessels; not necessarily for passengers, but where the captain has an eye to his own comfort and tastes that require gratification.

Those of Captain Lautanas are refined beyond the common run of skippers—usually rough sea-dogs. There is proof of it in the fittings of the Condor's cabin; which is neatly, if not luxuriously furnished, and handsomely decorated. In addition to the instruments belonging to his profession—his telescope, aneroid barometer, sextant, and compass, all placed conspicuously in racks—there is a book-case of ornamental wood, filled with well-bound volumes, with several squares of looking-glass, inlaid between the doors that lead to four little state-rooms—two on each side. And between these also are settees, with hair-cloth cushioning; beneath these last, lockers—the same in which Don Gregorio's gold-dust is stowed.

In the center stands a table, eight by six, mahogany, with massive legs, and feet firmly fixed to the floor. It is set lengthwise, fore and aft; a stout hair-cloth chair at top, another at bottom, and one at each side; all like the table stanchioned to the timbers of the floor.

Above, a rack, with an array of decanters and glasses, and in the center a swing-lamp of lacquered brass, so constructed as to throw a brilliant glare on the surface of the table, while giving light more subdued to all other parts of the cabin.

This night its rays are reflected with more than ordinary sparkle. For the table beneath is spread with the best plate and glass-ware belonging to Captain Lautanas. And in the dishes there set, are the most savory viands the Condor's cook can produce, while in the decanters are the choicest wines that can be extracted from her stores.

Around are seated the same guests, the captain, as host, at the head of the table, Don Gregorio, his *vis-a-vis*, at the foot, while the two girls at the sides are opposite each other.

As the barque is going with but a light breeze, without the slightest roll or pitch, there is no need of guards upon the table. It shows only the spread of snow-white damask, the shining silver plate, the steel of Sheffield, and the ware of Stafford, alongside cut-glasses and decanters. In the center an epergne containing a variety of fruits, with some flowers that, despite exposure to the saline breeze, Captain Lautanas has nursed into blooming. But the fruits seem flowers of themselves, having come from California, famed for the products of Pomona. There are peaches, the native growth of Yerba Buena gardens, with plums and nectarines; there are melons and grapes from Los Angeles, further south; with the oranges, plantains and pine-apples of San Diego. Besides these productions of a tropic and subtropical clime, are Newtown pippins, that have been imported into California from the far Eastern States, mellowed by a sea voyage of several thousand miles around the stormy headland of Cape Horn.

And in the bottles and decanters, richer by a like long sea transport, are wines comprising the ports and sherries of Portugal and Spain; the lighter vintages of France, champagne, claret and burgundy; the sweet but heavy "South Side" of Medina; with hard hock of its best kind—Johannisberger.

The savory meats tasted, eaten, and removed, the dessert with its adjuncts have been brought upon the table; this including the wines above specified. Although not habitually given to bibbing, the Chilean skipper enjoys his glass; and on this occasion takes half a dozen. It may be more. He is desirous of doing honor to his distinguished guests, and of giving them his pleasant entertainment.

His amiability is rewarded by success. In addition to having seen much of the world, he is by birth and education a gentleman. Although nothing more than skipper of a merchant vessel—a South Sea trader, at that—he is not one of the rude, swaggering sort, but a gentle creature, in seeming better befitted for the boudoir of a lady, than to stir among tarred ropes, or face the conflicting storm.

So kind and good is he that his two fair passengers, in the short companionship of less than a month's duration, have grown to regard him with affection. While he who is father of one, and grandfather of the other, looks upon him in the light of a faithful friend.

All three feel regret that they are so soon to part company with him. It is the only regret that casts a shadow over their spirits, as they sit conversing with him around a table so richly furnished for their gratification.

Eating fragrant fruits and sipping sweet wines, for the moment they forget it. All the easier listening to the tales with which he essays to entertain them. He relates strange adventures he has had, on and around the shores of the great South Sea.

Where could he have voyaged to meet with more romance? There he has encountered the fierce Feejean and the New Caledonian, alike addicted to the horrid habit of antropophagy. There he has been a spectator to the voluptuous dances of Samoa; and looked upon the daughters of Otaheite, whose whole life is love.

With tales of the two extremes—symbols of man's supreme happiness, and his most heartfelt misery—grim cannibals, and gay odalisques—he amuses his guests at the dinner-table, long detaining them over their desert.

Enthralled by his narrative, *naïve* as truthful—in correspondence with the character of the man—all three listen attentively. The señoritas are charmed; and, strange to say, more with his account of Fiji and New Caledonia, than those relating to Otaheite or Hawaii. For to the last named group of islands have gone Edward Crozier and Willie Cadwallader. These may there meet some of the brown-skinned *rayadores* Captain Lautanas so enthusiastically describes; meet, dance with, and admire them! Why may they not?

Of during the voyage has Carmen recalled the *sans facon* of that parting in California. And always with pain. So also Inez; neither having yet had an explanation. Harry Blew had been approached in vain. No "billetta," had been intrusted to him, no message whatever.

Both continue to regard the conduct of the young officers as strange—something of a mystery. But as they hope to have it cleared up at Cadiz, any jealous fancies summoned up by the narrations of Captain Lautanas are fleeting as the shadows of summer clouds passing over the sun. They soon give place to pleasanter thoughts.

And now that land is near and a seaport soon to be reached, they are this night unusually elated; and scarce think of the supposed neglect of their engaged lovers.

In return they give confidence to the Chilean skipper. He is even so far admitted into the family intimacy as to be told of certain interesting intentions, how both are soon to become brides. Don Gregorio has long since disclosed this intelligence, with much besides relating to his own fortune and affairs, and the Chilean, who hopes some day to carry the Condor to Cadiz, is invited to visit them, and make their house his home.

Several hours are spent in pleasant converse, interrupted with song and music—for both señoritas sing, accompanying themselves with the guitar.

Then the ladies retire to their state-rooms, not for rest, but to robe themselves, with the design of taking a turn on deck. The smooth motion of the ship, with the soft moonlight streaming through the cabin-windows, entices them to spend half an hour in the open air, before retiring for the night.

Lautanas and Don Gregorio remain seated at the table. Warmed by the wine—of which both have partaken pretty freely—the skipper continues to pour his experiences into the ear of his passenger; while the latter listens with unflagging interest. Sipping choice *canario*, his favorite tittle, the former takes no note of aught that is passing around, nor thinks of what may be doing on the Condor's deck. All night long has he forgotten her, and neglected the duties appertaining to him in the direction of his ship. So much that he has failed to notice a rotatory motion of the cabin, or the table on which the decanters stand, or, if noting, has attributed it to the *canario*, disturbing the balance of his brain.

But the cabin has revolved, the table along with it, to the extent of a three-quarter circle. Gradually has the movement been made; gently, for the sea is calm; silently, with no voice commanding in stentorian tone, no pipe of boatswain, no song of sailors bracing round the yards, or lowering tacks and sheets.

CHAPTER LVII.

LOOKING FOR LANDMARKS.

With all sail set the barque glides silently on; going to her doom.

Gomez has taken hold of the helm, and is guiding her—he alone having any knowledge of the coast.

They are now less than a league from land, and shaving close along the outer edge of the coral reef, with no fear of going among the breakers. The land breeze, blowing off, makes it easy to keep clear of them.

Notwithstanding what he has said, Gomez is not so sure of his whereabouts. The compass can no longer serve him, nor is it regarded. He keeps his eyes upon the cliff line, endeavoring to recognize some landmark. He knows the coast of Veragua, but not this particular part of it. He is better acquainted with the Bay of Panama and its shores, since there he has done most of the contraband he boasted of.

His dislike to enter it was reasonable enough.

The shore along which they are now running is desolate, with no likelihood of encountering ships. A coasting schooner, or fishing-smack, they might; but no cruiser to speak or chase them. For they are sailing alongside of a wide estuary, with no seaport of any note around it; quite out of the track of commerce.

A mountain has risen on the starboard bow and is gradually drawing to the beam. Gomez fancies he remembers it. Soon he is sure. For in the clear moonlight is disclosed a singular mountain shape, that once seen will not be easily forgotten. It is a *cerro* with two summits, twin peaks having a deep depression, like a Spanish saddle between. As the barque brings it abeam, the moon low down, shining through the hollow curvature, produces a striking effect.

Gomez is certain he has seen that strangely-shaped *cerro* before. But, no matter. Though a conspicuous landmark, it does not tell him where he can land; only that he is entering the great gulf that indents the Veraguan coast.

As the mountain moves on toward the quarter, a reach of clear water opens inland. To all appearances, a bay with a mouth several miles in width.

At sight of this he would run the barque into it; and is about putting the helm down for this purpose.

But no; he is forbidden by the breakers, which he can see extending across the entrance from cape to cape. They present a barrier too dangerous to be attempted even by a boat.

He at once steadies the helm, and the Condor keeps her course.

The open reach is run past, and the land is again within less than a league.

First appears a low projecting spit, and then the broader disk of dark, continuous cliff. When these come fairly abeam, the steersman spies what he has been long looking for—an open space interrupting the line of breakers. It is easily told by the tranquil surface of blue, contrasting with the white horse-tails that lash up on each side.

On seeing this, some distance ahead, Gomez drops the wheel, passing the spokes to the Dutch sailor; as he does so, giving the latter directions how to steer; as also what he is to do, when steering shall be no longer needed.

Then moving forward, he makes ready for the grand *coup*—that part of it apportioned to him and Hernandez.

At the same time, the others are also engaged in maturing their preparations. Padillo and his party, Striker belonging to it, move briskly about the fore-castle, some carrying cords for tying up Captain Lautanas and his passenger; others axes and crow-bars—the keys with which they intend to open the lockers.

In the waist near the mainmast stands the first mate, Davis beside him. In his hand, the former has a lantern alight; the latter a large auger, a mallet, a chisel—in short, a full set of boring tools. They are close to the main hatchway, intending to go down into the hold.

There is no need for haste. The scuttling of a ship takes little time. It is but to drill a hole through her bottom timbers, and let the sea run in. She will sink, sooner or later, according to the size of the hole.

Harry Blew does not seem anxious to hurry himself. On the contrary he looks reluctant to go below. With the lit lantern concealed under the skirt of his ample dreads, he stands in the shadow of the mast, as if ashamed to show his face, reflecting on his faithlessness.

Some thought coming across his mind, he steps toward the ship's side, and looks over the rail, bringing the moon full upon him. Her soft, innocent beam falling athwart his guilty countenance again discovers on it an expression difficult to read. There are signs of more than one emotion; many mingling together, or succeeding each other, quick as the changing hues of the chameleon, or the radiations of the aurora. Now it seems cupidity; now more like remorse, and the dark shadow of despair.

And as this deepens, he draws nearer to the ship's side, and looks over the rail, as if determined to jump into the sea, and so rid himself of a life ever after to be a burden to him!

While standing thus in apparent hesitation, soft voices sound upon his ear, mingling their mellow tones with the swish of the breeze, as it breaks through the rigging of the ship. Simultaneously he hears the rustling of dresses, and soon after he sees two gentle forms, robed in white, with shawls over their shoulders, and kerchiefs covering their heads, stepping out on the quarter-deck. They stand for a short while, the moon shining on their faces, both soft and beautiful as her beams.

Then they stroll aft, little dreaming of the danger so near, or the dread doom that awaits them.

Their unsuspecting innocence should soften the traitor's heart. Instead, it seems to steel it the more, as though their presence had called up and quickened some vowed revenge.

Harry Blew hesitates no longer, but gliding toward the hatch, climbs over its combing, and, lantern in hand, goes soon to do a deed that no light should ever shine on.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE TINTORERAS.

THOUGH within the tropic zone, and but a few degrees from the equinoctial line, there is chilliness in the air of the night, now nearing its mid hours. Drawing their cloaks closely around them, the young ladies mount to the sternmost part of the deck, and stand leaning their hands on the taffrail.

For a time they are silent, their eyes cast over the sea, watching the ship's way, and the foam in her wake, lit up with luminous phosphorence. They observe other sparkling scintillations besides that on the furrow of the Condor's keel. There are patches of it all over the surface, and several elongated *silons* seemingly of some creatures in motion, swimming parallel to the ship's course, and keeping pace with her.

The girls have not voyaged through thirty degrees of the Pacific ocean without having learnt how these luminous traces are made, and what kind of creatures are making them. They know them to be sharks, and also that some larger and of brighter luminosity are the tracks of the *tintoreras*—that species so much dreaded by the pearl-divers of Panama Bay, and the Gulf of California. This night both *tiburones* and *tintoreras* appear more numerous than they have ever before noticed them. They are seen on all sides, coming closer than has been their wont.

Those observing, naturally imagine that it is because of their having approached nearer the land; but the sharks have a different reason. They have seen a boat lowered down, which gives them anticipation of prey coming within reach of their ravenous jaws.

"*Santisima!*" exclaims Carmen, as a *tintorera* makes a dash at some waif that has slipped over the side, and gone floating astern. "What a frightful fate it would be to fall overboard, in the midst of those horrid creatures. One wouldn't have the slightest chance of being saved. Only to think how little space there is between us and certain death! Look at that monster just below, with its great glaring eyes; it looks as if it wanted to leap up and lay hold of us. Ugh! I mustn't look at it any longer; it makes me tremble in a strange way. If I continued to gaze at it, I should grow giddy and fall over. *Sobrina*, are you not glad we're so near to the end of our voyage?"

"I'm not sorry, *tia*. I fancy no one ever is. I should be more pleased, however, if it were the end of our voyage, which, unfortunately, it isn't. We've got another to go through quite as long before we see Spain."

"True, as long in duration and distance, but otherwise very different, and I hope more endurable. Across the Atlantic we'll have passage in a big steamship with a grand dining-saloon, and state-rooms large as the main cabin of the Condor. Besides we'll have plenty of company; passengers like ourselves. Let us pray that these may turn out nice people. If so, our Atlantic voyage will be more enjoyable than this one on the Pacific."

"But we've been very comfortable in the Condor; and I'm sure Captain Lautanas has done all he could to make things agreeable for us."

"He has, indeed, the dear good creature, and I shall ever feel grateful to him. Still you must admit that notwithstanding his well meant exertions, we've been at times a little bored by his learned dissertations. Oh, Inez! it's been awfully lonely, and frightfully monotonous—at least to me."

"Ah! *tia*! I understand what you want is a bevy of bachelors for fellow-passengers; young ones, at that. Well, I suppose there will be some on the big steamer. Like enough a half-score of our mustached *militarios*, returning from Cuba, and the other colonies. Would that make an Atlantic voyage enjoyable?"

"Not mine—nothing of the sort, as you know, Inez. To speak truth, it was neither the loneliness nor monotony of our Pacific voyage that has made it so miserable—something else."

"I think I can guess the something else."

"If so you'll be clever. It's more than I can."

"Might it have anything to do with those cold parting compliments, and the informal leave-taking? Of course it has. Come, Carmen! You promised me you'd think no more about that matter, till we see them in Cadiz, and have it all cleared up."

"You're wrong again, Inez; it isn't any thing of the sort."

"What then? It can't be the *mare amiento*! Of it, I might complain. I'm even suffering slightly from it now, although every thing is so calm. But you, why you stand the sea like one of those rough sailors themselves. You're just the woman to be a navy officer's wife; and when your *novio* gets command of a ship, I suppose you'll be for sailing all round the world with him."

"You're merry, *mora*."

"Well, who wouldn't be, with the prospect of so soon setting foot on land? For my part, I detest the sea, and when I marry my little *guardia marina* I'll make him quit it, and take to some pleasant profession. And if he prefers doing nothing, by good luck my lands in Andalusia will keep us both comfortably, with something to spare for our town house in

Cadiz. But come, *tia*, tell me what's been troubling you? Surely you must know."

"Surely I don't, *sobrina*; I can't tell you."

"That's strange; almost mysterious. Might it be regret at leaving behind your *preux chevalier* of California—that grand, gallant De Lara, whom at our last interview we saw rolling about and kicking up his heels in the road-dust? You ought to feel greatly relieved at getting rid of him; as I, of my unfortunate suitor, Calderon. By the way, I wonder what became of them? Only to think of their never coming near us again, and that we never saw or heard of them afterward! Something must have happened to hinder them bidding us good-by. What could it have been? I've tried to think, but can't."

"Nor can I. The thing is indeed strange, though I fancy father knows something about them—more than he is willing to tell us. You remember what happened after we left the house—those men going to it in the night. Father believes it was their intention to rob him of his gold, thinking it was still there. And what's more, he suspects that the four men—for there appears to have been four—were no others than our friends the Señores De Lara and Calderon, with accomplices."

"*Maria de merced!* It's frightful to reflect on such villainy, and we ought to be thankful to the good saint for saving us from the villains, by getting away from the country where men like those are allowed to live."

"Dear Inez, you've touched the point—the very thing that's been distressing me. For it is neither more nor less than the remembrance of these men. Ever since leaving San Francisco, and before we left, I've had strange heaviness on my heart—a sort of boding fear—that we haven't yet seen the last of them. It has haunted me like a specter. I can't tell why, unless it be from what I've seen of Don Francisco De Lara and know of him. Rest assured he's not the man to submit to the great insult put upon him, of which we were witnesses. For a reason I know—and which you may guess at—that disgrace will rankle till he can take revenge for it. We expected to hear of a duel. Likely there would have been one but for the sailing of the American ship, which made it impossible. But that won't hinder such a man as Don Francisco from going after Don Eduardo, and trying to kill him, any way he can. I have a fear he may follow him."

"Well, if he does, your Eduardo can take care of himself, as can my Guillermo, if Calderon should take it into his silly head to go after him. Let them go. They're not likely to come after us."

"I'm not so sure of that. They know where we're going, and could easily get there too. Such as they can make their way anywhere. Professional gamblers—and we know them to be this—travel to all parts of the world. All great cities afford them an opportunity to pursue their dishonest calling, as would Cadiz. And, Inez, there's something I haven't told you, thinking you might make mock of it. I've had a fright more than once—several times since we left San Francisco."

"A fright! What sort of fright?"

"If you promise you won't laugh at me, I'll tell you."

"I promise it. I wait."

"It would be no laughing matter were it true. But of course it can only be a fancy."

"About what? tell me, *tia*. Let me pronounce."

"About the sailors on board this barque; all have bad faces, some of them look like very *demonios*. But, do you know, Inez, there's one who has eyes exactly like De Lara's. His features too resemble those of Don Francisco, only that the sailor has a big black beard, while De Lara had none; of course the resemblance can be only accidental. Still, I tell you, it caused me a start when I first noticed it, and several times since. Never more than this very morning, when I was up here and saw that man. He was at the wheel, all by himself, steering. Once, on turning suddenly round, I caught him looking straight at me, staring in the most insolent manner. I had half a mind to complain to Captain Lautanas, but reflecting that we were so near the end of our voyage—"

Carmen Montijo is not permitted to finish what she intended saying. For at the moment a man springing up to the poop, as if he had risen out of it, stands face to face before her. It is the sailor she has been speaking of—he who resembles De Lara!

She has but time to identify him, when he says:

"Not near the end of your voyage, but *at it*. Now, ladies!" he adds, "we are going ashore. The boat is down, and combining business with pleasure, it's my duty to conduct you into her."

While he is speaking, another of the sailors approaches Inez, and offers his services in a similar strain of irony.

For a moment the two girls are speechless through sheer surprise. Horror succeeds as the truth breaks upon them. And then instead of coherent speech, they make answer by a simultaneous shriek, both attempting to retreat toward the cabin stairs.

Not a step is permitted them. They are seized in strong arms, and half-dragged, half-lifted off their feet, hurried away from the taffrail.

Even their cries are hindered by Dutch night-caps drawn over their heads, and down to their chins, almost stifling them.

Not seeing, and but indistinctly hearing, they can yet guess where they are going. They feel themselves lifted over the ship's side, down the companionway into a boat; along the bottom of which they are at length laid, and there held fast, as if they had fallen into the jaws of those terrible *tintoreras*, seen keeping company with the ship!

CHAPTER LIX.

THE SHIP SHALL FLOAT!

HARRY BLEW in the hold, Bill Davis beside him.

They are standing on the bottom timbers of the ship. It has cost them some trouble to reach a place suitable to their fiendish design. The Chilean barque has a three-fourths cargo—sundries shipped in the Oriental archipelago, and Pacific Isles. With which she is laden chock up to the 'tween-decks.

Clambering over sandal-wood logs, cases of Manila cigars, and piles of tortoise-shell—then clearing some of the articles out of the way—they get sight of the vessel's ribs and outside planking, at a point which they know to be under the water-line. They know also that a hole bored between their feet, though ever so small, will in due time fill the

barque's hold with water, and sink her to the bottom of the sea.

Davis, auger in hand, stands in readiness to bore the hole. Blew equally ready to direct him.

Only in seeming. Something stays the latter from giving the word, as the former from commencing the work without it.

It is a thought that seems to occur simultaneously to both, bringing their eyes up to one another's faces, in a glance mutually interrogative. Davis is the first to put it in the shape of speech.

"I don't like to do it. Dang me if I do!"

"Shipmate! ye've spoke my mind, exact, as you know from what I've been sayin' already."

"Tisn't nothing short of murder; that's sure; and that's just why I ain't up to it. The more as there isn't any downright necessity. You spoke the truth about that."

"I did. I could see no good reason for sinking the ship; no more can I now. She'd sail right out and we'd never hear word o' her again. An' if they did get picked up, what matters that to us? We'll be out o' the way, long afore they could get anywhere to gi'e evidence against us. Ne'er a fear o' their ever finding us—neyther you nor me, anyhow. I dare say, Davis, you mean to steer for some port where we're not likely to meet any more Spaniards. I do when I've stowed my share o' the plunder."

"Yes; I'm for Sidney soon's I can get there. That's the place for men like me."

"You'll be safe enough. So I, where I intend goin'. And we'll both feel better not havin' a ugly thing to reflect back on. Which we would if we send these three poor creeturs to Davy's locker. I say to you what you heerd me propose to the rest; let's gi'e them a chance for their lives."

"And not do this?"

As he puts the question Davis points his auger to the bottom of the ship.

"There ain't no need—not a morsel o' good can come from the sinkin' her. And not a bit harm in lettin' her sail on."

"What will the others say?"

"They won't know anything about it—they can't unless we tell 'em. An' we won't be the fools to do that. As I argied to them, with the wind off shore, as 'tis now, she'll scud out o' sight o' land long afore daylight. Bill Davis! whatsoever the others may do, or think they're doin', let's me an' you keep our consciences clear o' this foul deed. Believe me, mate, we'll both feel better for't, some day, it may be long after."

"If you think they won't know, I'm agreed."

"How can they? There ain't none o' them to see what we do down here; 'tain't likely there's any listenin'. Gi'e a knock or two wi' the mallet."

The ship's carpenter obeying strikes several blows against an empty water-cask, the noise ascending through the open hatch.

He suspends his stroke, hearing exclamations above, the screams in the shrill treble of female voices.

"You see they're not thinkin' o' us," says the mate. "The Spaniards are too busy about their own part. They're gettin' the girls into the boat."

"Yes; that's what they're doing."

"Sweet girls both be, ain't they, Davis?"

"Ay, that they are; a pair of regular beauties."

"Look here, shipmate! Since we've settled this other thing, I want to say a word about them. Gomez an' that land-lubber Hernandez are layin' claim to them, as if they had a right. Now they haven't, no more than any o' the rest o' us. Some others may have fancies too. I confess to havin' a weakness for her wi' the copper-colored hair, which is she as Gil Gomez wants to 'propriate. I made no objection to his taking her into the boat. But soon's we get ashore, I intend to stand out for my rights, just as good as his. Do you feel like backin' me?"

"Blast me if I don't! I feel sweet upon the dark 'un; and have ever since I set eyes on her in the harbor of San Francisco. Like yourself, Blew, I wasn't going to give that point up, before having a talk about it. You say the word—I'll stand by you. And if it comes to a fight, I'll make short work with that knock-kneed chap Hernandez, who appears to be the one as wants her. We can count on Jack Striker on our side, and n o s t like the Dane and Dutchman. La Crosse for certain, for Frenchy don't cotton to the Spaniards, ever since his quarrel with Padillo. Hang it, Harry Blew, let's go in for the girls, whether we care to keep them or not. You can take the light-haired; I'm for the dark one. And, blast me, if I ain't ready to fight for her—to the death! The only thing troubling me as to her, all along, is supposing I get her, what's to be done afterward? We're landing on a strange shore, where these Spanish chaps will be at home, and have the advantage of us. There's been my difficulty. Now, as we propose sailing in the same boat, can you see the way out of it?"

"Clearly."

"How?"

"Because the girls don't care for eyther o' them two as are layin' claim to them. Contrary-wise they hate 'em both. I've knowed that all along. Now if we get 'em clear o' their clutches, at the same time givin' the girls a whisper about protectin' them, it'll be all right; and the senyoritas 'll consent to go wi' us. Afterwar, we can act accordin' to the chances that turn up. Only swear you'll stand by me, Bill Davis, an' wi' Striker to back us we'll bring every thing right."

"I'm bound to stand by you; so will Jack. Hark! that's him now! He's callin' to us to come. Ha! I believe he's in the boat."

"He is. Let's hurry on deck. Possible them Spaniards may take it into their heads— Quick, shipmate! Heave after me!"

So speaking, Harry Blew held out the lantern to light them up the hatchway, both ascending toward the deck as though their lives depended upon the rapidity with which they can reach it.

CHAPTER LX.

"SHOVE OFF!"

SIMULTANEOUS with the abduction on the Condor's deck is a scene in her cabin that resembles a saturnalia of demons.

The skipper and Don Gregorio, still over their walnuts and wine, are startled by the sound of footsteps descending the stairs. They are heavy and hurried, bearing no resemblance to the gentle tread of ladies.

It can not be these coming down, nor yet the negro cook; since his voice is heard on the deck forward. Heard, too, in accents that speak of surprise and ex-postulation.

No wonder. Two of the sailors have caught him in the galley, throttled him back on the bench; and are there lashing him with a piece of the log-line, taken from off the reel.

They at the cabin table know nothing of this. They hear his cries, but have no time to speculate on why they are put forth. Both cry out themselves as the cuddy-door is dashed open, and a crowd rushes in. There are several sailors, the second mate among them.

Lautanas, facing the door, sees them first. Don Gregorio, turning on his seat, the instant after. Neither thinks of demanding a reason for the rude intrusion. The determined air of the intruders, with the fierce, reckless expression on their faces, tell it would be idle. Besides, the shouts of the negro on deck; and just then others overhead, cries of distress in the shrill treble of women's voices, well known.

The two men at the table are at first surprised, then paled with intense terror.

Before they can shake it off, and rise to take action, they are seized and restrained. Strong sailors throwing arms round each, hold them down on their seats; while others handling ropes, with the adroitness peculiar to their calling, make them fast by lashings around their legs, arms and body.

In time, short as it takes to tell it, they are secured to the stanchioned chairs, bolt upright, firm as bollard-heads.

They have not silently submitted. Both utter angry speech, threats and ejaculations. Not for long are they allowed. One of the sailors, seizing a pair of nut-crackers, thrusts them between Captain Lautanas's teeth, thus gagging him.

Another with a corkscrew does the like for Don Gregorio.

Then the work of pillage proceeds.

It does not take much time. Padillo, as second mate, has had occasional access to the cabin. He has long since learned where the treasure is stowed; the particular lockers containing it. Their lids are forced, and the boxes of gold-dust dragged out. Small, but ponderous, they are each load enough for a man; and one laying hold of each bears it off to the boat.

Several comings and goings are required for the transhipment, but it is at length over; the boxes lie along the bottom of the pinnace.

Still the cupidity of the pirates is not satisfied, and five minutes more are spent ransacking the cabin, and appropriating other articles that tempt them. There is the jewelry of the ladies, with other items of value, scattered about their staterooms. These hastily grabbed, the plunderers make their last ascent of the cabin stairs.

One lingers behind, that fiend in human shape, who has all along counseled killing. Left alone with the men, now helpless and at his mercy, he looks as if still determined to carry out his inhuman design. He has no thought of showing compassion, as might appear by his passing from one to the other, and striking the gags from between their teeth. Nothing of the kind. He has done it from a freak of fancy, or to hear what his victims may have to say. He knows it can but little benefit them. In mocking tone, he apostrophizes them:

"Caramba! I can't think of leaving two gentlemen seated at such a well-furnished table without being able to enjoy the feast and converse with one another. No; that would never do."

Then turning indignantly toward Lautanas, he continues:

"You see, captain, I'm not spiteful; else I shouldn't think of showing you this bit of civility, after the insults you've offered me since I've been second officer of your ship."

Then approaching Don Gregorio with an air of excited anger, he shrieks into his ear:

"Perhaps you don't remember me, Senor Montijo; I see you don't; but I do you. Can your worship recall a circumstance that occurred some six years ago, when you were Alcalde-Mayor of Yerba Buena? You may remember having a poor fellow pilloried and whipped for doing a bit of contraband. I was that unfortunate individual. And now I take satisfaction for the indignity put upon me. Keep your seats, gentlemen, both. Drink your wine and eat your walnuts. Don't be afraid of consuming what's set before you. Before you've cleared the table, it and the barque will be at the bottom of the sea; your noble selves the same."

Neither Don Gregorio nor Lautanas makes rejoinder. They are too stupefied to speak. And in the midst of their silence, the ruffian again raises his voice; this time in a peal of triumphant laughter, continued as he ascends the stair, after striding out of the cuddy and clanging the door behind him.

On deck he sees himself alone; and gliding on to the ship's waist, he scrambles over the side and down into the pinnace.

There he finds every thing stowed, the oarsmen seated on the thwarts, their oars in the row-locks, ready to shove off.

They had not been waiting alone for him; but for the first mate and the carpenter, who are still aboard.

Some in the boat show impatience, and express it. The barque has been set head toward the sea, her helm lashed to hold her in that direction. With all sail set, she is towing them out from shore, and every minute spent will cost them labor to regain the lost ground.

There are those who would gladly let loose and leave the laggards behind. Padillo, soon as stepping into the boat, proposes it, Gomez and Velarde abetting him.

But their traitorous intent is opposed by Striker. However otherwise morally debased, the ex-convict is true to the men who speak his own tongue.

There is an excited scene in the pinnace. It brings out bitter feelings, and threatens blows. For Harry Blew and Davis the moment is critical. The Spaniards have no wish to wait for them, but the opposite—a desire to go off without them. They would betray their fellow-traitors, and let them sink with the ship!

Striker protests in strong, determined language. He is backed by the Dutchman, Dane and La Crosse, while the two other sailors are silent, seeming neu-

tral. In a struggle there can be no telling the result, with numbers and strength so equally matched.

It does not come to this. All at once it occurs to the ruffians that those they propose leaving behind would not be helpless. They could not launch the long-boat, this being on board. But the captain's gig! If they could lower, or cut down, and come after. Ashore they would resent the cowardly desertion.

"Bah!" exclaims Padillo, thus forecasting. "We're only jesting, Striker. Of course we have no intention to abandon them."

"Ha! ha! ha!" he continues, with a forced laugh. "We'd be the blackest of traitors to behave that way."

Striker takes no heed of this protesting speech. He is earnestly occupied, shouting to his former fellow-convict and Harry Blew, alternately calling their names.

He at length gets response; and soon after sees both of them clambering over the rail.

"Hello, Bill, you and Blew! What's been a-keepin' ye? Hurry down! These Spanish chaps have been threatenin' to go off without ye."

"Hang it!" responds Davis, "I hope that's not true!"

"Caramba!" exclaims Padillo. "Nothing of the kind; we were only a little impatient, afraid you might delay too long, and the vessel go down with you aboard of her."

"Not much danger of that," says Blew. "It'll be some time before she sinks. Ye tied the rudder for her to run out, didn't ye?"

"Ay, ay!" responds the man last at the wheel.

"All right! Shove off! That wind will take her straight to seaward, and long afore sunrising she'll be out o' sight, one way or t'other. Give way there, way!"

The oars dip. The boat parts from the side, with stem turned shoreward.

The barque, with all sail set, surrendered to herself, goes off before the breeze, that now bears her away toward the wide wilderness of ocean!

CHAPTER LXI.

"GONE, ALL GONE!"

STRAIGHT to sea stands the Condor, her spread canvas looking like a white cloud under the shimmering moonbeams.

Though, crewless, she sails not in silence. There are sounds both upon her deck and in her cabin; the voices of men speaking, shouting, groaning, going on as if crazed.

The negro cook cries from the interior of his caboose. Tied to the bench, where he has been accustomed to watch the boiling of his pots, he makes intermittent struggle to set himself free, at intervals calling for help.

It does not come; he knows it can not, and knowing this, at length gives up the effort, and sinks into a silent and sullen despair.

In the cabin below the struggle and the sounds accompanying it continue longer. For they making them have not so readily yielded. It was some time before either could realize what had occurred, or think it other than a dream. The intrusion of the sailors, the quick action following; themselves bound and gagged; the lockers broken open, the gold carried away, and then the taunting speeches of Padillo, all seemed the changing phantasmagoria of some dread dream, for a time stupefying both.

Soon as ungagged, however, they recover somewhat of their senses, and make use of their tongues. Lautanas storms in fierce, foaming anger, his speech consisting of threats and interrogations, interspersed with oaths. The gentle Chilean is for a time transformed into a fiend. His eyes, rolling in their sockets, gleam with vengeful light, his head jerked to and fro to the danger of dislocating the vertebrae of his neck! all the time his body almost motionless, his arms unable to add gesture to his terrible objurgations.

Don Gregorio had commenced storming too, before his speech was stopped by the corkscrew. Now that his tongue is again free, he employs it in appeal, for he has meanwhile heard shrieks outside, announcing the seizure of the girls. From their cries being no more heard, he knows they have been in some way stopped, and that they are now in the hands of captors not to be scared by threats, as little likely to respond to any appeal however piteous. He only puts it forth with the despairing instinct of a parent, wretched and bereft. After what has passed, he may well deem his entreaties useless, as Lautanas his threats. There can be no hope for mercy from the men to whom they are made, and as little chance of their submission. What can they expect from robbers, pirates, in the act of plundering?

They think of one who may come to their aid—only one. Despite all that has passed, Captain Lautanas can not imagine that his first officer is among the mutineers. Nor can Don Gregorio realize the fact that the man, so recommended to him, has turned traitor.

Still believing him true, both call out his name.

But there is no response—only the echo of their own voices reverberating through the ship.

They hear other voices outside—the clamor of the retreating pirates.

The man-of-war's-man can't be among them. In the endeavor to do his duty he has fallen a victim. Silent, he must be dead!

While thus charitably reflecting, there comes a crushing response. Through the cabin windows voices enter—shouts interspersed with speeches. A man vociferates, pronouncing two names, one that of the first mate. It is Striker calling to him and Davis to come away from the ship.

Soon after Harry Blew's voice is heard in response—not as one held in *durese*, or defending himself, but acting in full concert with the robber crew.

No longer have they hopes of help from him; no more do they shout out his name. But the moment before believing him dead, they may now well wish it. As drowning men, with the last plank pulled from under them, they are for a time stricken dumb.

And while thus seated, *ris-a-vis*, silently gazing in one another's faces, they hear a dull thud against the ship's side, the stroke of a boat-hook pushing the pinnace off. Then oars commence working in the tholes, succeeded by the plashing of the blades in the water. After that the regular "dip, dip,"

with intervals of silence between, at length dying away as the boat recedes from the barque, leaving the latter silent as a cemetery, in the hour of midnight.

Seated with faces turned toward the cabin windows, Don Gregorio can see through them. As the barque's bow rises on the swell, depressing her stern, he commands a view of the water surface in her wake. The moon, gleaming brightly, gives him a prospect far extending; terminated by something which is not sea.

The dark disk showing the horizon behind can not be clouds, but coast, a range of cliffs running right and left.

From this he can tell that the barque is stern toward the land, and sailing away from it! Only mechanically does he make the discovery; and with like listlessness his eyes rest on a line of crested breakers between.

Another line at right-angles to the coast also comes under his eye, but without fixing his attention. He knows it to be the furrow of the barque's keel, churning the sea into shining phosphorescence. Suddenly he starts, giving keener gaze, as a dark object shoots athwart the fiery track. It is a boat filled with forms, oar-blades rising and falling on both sides of it. No wonder at the earnest, anxious look he bends on that boat—a look of concentrated distress. It contains all that is dear to him—bearing that all away he knows not whither, to a fate that chills his blood to reflect upon.

The boat is being rowed for the shore, the barque sailing away from it; each moment increases the distance between. But for a long time Don Gregorio can distinguish the forms moving along the luminous track, the oar-blades on each side flashing intermittently in the moonlight.

At length he sees it entering the line of breakers; and beyond he loses sight of it under the shadow of the coast cliffs.

These soon after disappear from his view, as they sink below the rising line of the horizon.

"Gone! all gone!" groans the bereaved father, his head dropping down on his breast, his countenance showing surrender to helpless, hopeless despair.

CHAPTER LXII.

AFTER LANDING.

THE boat bearing the pirates, their spoils and captives, has rowed on toward the shore.

These last are in the stern sheets, Gomez and Hernandez in charge of them.

There is no need for keeping guard over them; they can not escape but by leaping into the sea, which would be to drop into the jaws of the *lintoreras*, two of which are seen alongside, with several of the other sharks swimming astern.

It would be indeed self-destruction; and in the first moments of wild, passionate despair, Carmen Montijo is almost tempted to seek it, for she has heard the speeches exchanged, and there can be no ambiguity about their import. Her father devoted to a cruel death—going down with the ship. She wishes she were along with him. Better than survive for a fate on which her thoughts dare not dwell.

Similarly Inez reflects, knowing that the same fate is reserved for her.

They see not the doomed vessel sailing away. On being seized, elastic woolen caps were drawn upon their heads and over their faces. Not knowing the coast, or whether it be inhabited, the pirates approach it with caution, still keeping their captives hooded, to hinder them from crying out, or their cries being heard. But they need have no fear either of their attempting to escape or calling for help. Too well know the poor girls it would be idle. Long since have they succumbed to mute stupefaction.

Passing through the open reach, the breakers are left astern, and the boat moves over a sea surface smooth as an inland lake. There is but a light ripple from the land-breeze, and the gentle swell of the inflowing tide.

Rowing with caution, not letting the oars rattle in the row-locks, themselves observing silence, the pirates approach the shore. The moon is before them, going down, her lower limb already touching the dark crest line of cliff. In this they see a depression, in front of which appears to be a cove, as where some stream has hollowed out its estuary. A likely place for landing, and toward it they steer.

Soon they are under the shadow of the cliff, from the base of which a *talus* of loose rock stretches out to a belt of white sand beach. This seen through the obscurity shows an outline of horse-shoe shape, which denotes the curvature of a bay, with the precipices receding around it.

"Up starboard oars!" commanded Harry Blew.

"Give way on the port side."

And with a few more strokes the boat enters the embayment, and glides on to its inner end.

As its keel grates on the shingly strand, their ears are saluted by a chorus of cries, almost loud enough to deafen them.

It is the alarm-signal of sea birds, startled by the intrusion on their place of repose. Some spring up from the beach, others from ledges along the *jacude* of the cliff, still others from its summit. Among them are distinguished the shrill scream of the osprey, and the maniac laugh of the happy eagle.

Though these sounds are harsh, shrill and dissonant, they are not so to those who now hear them; on the contrary, agreeable; as proving that there is no house or human habitation near—just as they are desiring it, the coast is clear.

The boat beaches, and the pirates spring ashore. The captives are lifted out after; then the landing, one unresisting as the other. Some go in search of a place where they may pass the night; for it is too late to attempt moving inland. That must be left till the morning. Up the bay, under the cliff's base, they discover a steppe, or bench, several feet above sea level. It has an area of over an acre, and covered with coarse saline grass, will suit well for a camping-place. For this it is selected; and every thing brought away from the boat—even to the sails, oars and boat-hooks. These for the construction of a tent; for the sky becoming clouded, threatens a downpour of rain.

While planning how the sail can be best rigged to shelter them, a discovery is made that spares them this trouble. On searching along the cliff, they find it honeycombed with caves. There are four or five

with entrances almost contiguous, and one of ample dimensions, large as a hotel dining-room.

In anticipation of needing them they have brought away some ship's lamps. These are now lighted and throw their glare upon stalactites that sparkle like the crystals of chandeliers. In the reflected light the forms of the pirates are soon seen in various attitudes, some reclining on their spread pilot-coats or canvas-bags, others moving about, but all engaged in a debauch, with the spirit-keg tapped in their midst, and the bottles of wine taken from the cabin stores of the Condor. They drink, talk, sing, shout and swear, till the cavern rings with their ribaldry.

It is some pleasure to perceive that their captives are not compelled to take part in this rude revelry, nor yet be among them. To these have been appropriated one of the smaller caves close by, the boat-sail fixed in front, securing their privacy.

To this arrangement Harry Blew has been chief contributor—insisting on its being carried out. In the breast of the old man-of-war's-man there is still a spark of that delicacy due to habit, or superior training. Though his gratitude has given way to the greed of gold, he is not yet a debased savage, nor sunk to the low ruffianism of those around him.

While the carousal is being carried on within the cave, outside the overcast sky begins to discharge itself. Lightning forks and flashes athwart the firmament, thunder rolls and reverberates along the cliffs, a strong wind sweeps them, and rain rushes down in torrents.

It is but a tropic storm, short-lived and soon over. And when over, the atmosphere, cleared of its collected electricity, again returns to calm.

The storm lasts scarce an hour; but in that hour it lashes the sea, till the breakers outside, rolling on, form with the surf in shore, and both combined, with the reflux of the ebbing tide, set the pinnacle aloft and carry her out of the cove.

Seaward she drifts, till coming to the coral reef. There she is sucked in, tumbled over and about; at length going to pieces, that as waifs drift separately away, dancing and bounding over the foam-crested billows.

CHAPTER LXIII.

A THREATENED INTRUSION.

AN hour after midnight.

A calm has succeeded the short-lived tropic storm; and silence reigns around the little cove where the pirates have put in.

The sea-birds have returned to their roosts on the cliff ledge, and now perch noiselessly, save an occasional scream from the osprey eagle, as an owl, a whip-poor-will, or some other plunderer of the night flits past his place of repose, near enough to awake the tyrant of the sea-shore, and excite his jealous anger.

Other sounds are the dull boom of the outside breakers, and the lighter ripple of the tidal wave, washing over a strand rich in shells, with coral fragments, worn by attrition into a thousand fantastic shapes. Now and then a *manatee*, raising its bristled snout above the wave, gives out a low, prolonged wail, resembling the cry of some creature in mortal agony. Wonderfully like the moan of a human being with spirit sore oppressed; and for such might it be mistaken.

But there is no human voice now. The sailors, late forming the crew of the abandoned barque, have ended their carousal; their ribald jests and harsh cachinnation, long while inharmoniously mingling with the soft monotone of the sea, have ceased to be heard; as also the hum of their maudlin conversation, carried on for some time after. Astretch on their dreadnaught coats, they lie along the cavern floor, its hollow aisles echoing back but their snores and stertorous breathing.

They are not all asleep. Nor are they all inside the cave. One is on watch without, by the entrance of the grotto to which the captives have been consigned, and in which they are really confined. Now that they are ashore it is not deemed prudent to leave them to themselves. They might make an attempt at escape, with at least a possibility of success. To prevent this it has been determined to keep guard over them; and the first tour of this duty, commencing at midnight, has fallen to the lot of Velarde. At four in the morning he is to be relieved by Jack Striker.

The Spanish sailor has been about an hour upon his post, when he perceives two men drawing toward him. If it were not that he has already seen them issuing from the cavern, where his comrades are asleep, he might wonder who they are. Even thus there is reason for him to feel some surprise. Since the men making approach have no resemblance to mariners; neither do they look like any of his late shipmates on board the Chilean barque.

The moon has gone down, and it is too dark for him to distinguish their faces; but there is light enough reflected from the luminous surface of the sea to show him that neither is in sailor garb, but both in the habiliments of landmen—this the national costume of Spanish-California. He sees *sombreros* of ample brim; trousers open-seamed, flapping loose around their ankles, and cloaks over their shoulders, these last by their peculiar drapery recognizable as *mangas* of Mexico.

Though in the obscurity the color of the cloth cannot be determined, Velarde is aware that one is scarlet, the other sky-blue. For he knows who are the men moving toward him, and it is not the first time he has seen them so arrayed.

At their approach he does not show any surprise. Seated on a point of rock, several paces from the entrance to the grotto, and sucking a manilla, he keeps his place, and puffs away at his cigar with a tranquillity that tells he is not concerned about their intrusion.

They, on their part approach, without any sign of fear, stealth, or even caution. They both go slowly, conversing.

He with the scarlet cloak around his shoulders says to him in the sky-blue:

"I've been thinking, *campanero*, now we've got every thing straight so far, that our best plan will be to stay where we are till it's all fixed as we want it. We can send on for the *padre*, and bring him here. Or, failing him the *cura*, who may be found nearer at hand. To tell the truth, I haven't the slightest idea where we've come ashore; only that it's on the edge of a big bay that opens into Veragua. Still we

may be a goodish distance from Santiago; and going there, embargoed as we are, there's quite a possibility of being robbed of our pretty baggage on the route. You understand me?"

"*Si—ciertamente.*"

"Against risks of that kind it is necessary to take precautions. And the first, as also the best I can think of is to stay here till we've been spliced to our sweethearts. Rafael can act as a messenger, or, for that matter, Don Manuel. Either, with six words I shall intrust to him, will be pretty sure to return with an ecclesiastic having full power to perform the ceremony we stand in need of. Then we may march inland without fear—ay, with flying colors; both Benedicts, our blushing brides on our arms. In Santiago de Veragua we can spend our honeymoon."

"*Caramba!* It's a delightful anticipation."

"As you say. And for that reason we mustn't risk marring it. Which we might by traveling any further as simple bachelors. We must get married before going a step further."

"But the others! How about them? Are they to assist at our nuptials?"

"Certainly not."

"In what way is it to be avoided?"

"The simplest in the world. It's understood that we divide the plunder first thing in the morning. When that's done, and each has stowed away his share, I intend proposing that we separate; every one to go his own way."

"Will they agree to that, think you?"

"Of course they will. Why shouldn't they? It's the safest way for all, and they ought to see it. Twelve of us trooping together through the country, to say nothing of having the women along, and the trouble to be apprehended from their tongues—the story we're to tell about shipwreck may get discredited. Do the best we can there'll still be some danger of our being taken up. When that's made clear to our *camarados*, they'll be considerate for their own safety. Trust me for making it clear."

"Well, I hope there won't be any difficulty in getting rid of them. For ourselves, as you say, clearly the best course is to keep where we are till the thing's arranged. As we've got Don Manuel and Rafael for groomsmen, the only thing wanted will be bridesmaids. Ha—ha—ha!"

"Ha! ha!" rejoins Gomez, echoing the other's laugh. "We might have them, too, if it made any matter. In Santiago I could get a couple cheap enough. As it is, we'll be better without them. But now, let us see about our brides. Remember we've not yet proposed; and remember also, that we were once before on the way to do that, and got woefully disappointed. No danger now."

"No danger about our proposing; but much doubt of our being accepted. I suppose we may count upon a flat refusal."

"Let them refuse; little care I. It won't signify a straw one way or the other. The end shall be the same. In three days or less I intend calling Carmen Montijo my wife. If not, she shall be something else. She can have the choice; and this night, this hour, must make it. Let us on! I long to lay my hand and heart at her feet—to hear the dear girl's decision!"

The two walk on toward the grotto.

On nearing it, they perceive the sentinel upon the rock, some distance beyond.

Having something to say to him, they keep on to the place where he is seated.

At their approach he rises to his feet; and for a time the three stand conversing in muttered tones.

While they are thus occupied, another man glides out of the greater cavern, and goes toward them. Not openly and boldly, as if intending to join in their deliberations; but silently and by stealth, like one wishing to play spy upon them.

He is in sailor garb, wearing an ample pilot cloth coat, which he buttoned on coming out into the night air. But, before closing it around him, the butt of a large pistol, as also the handle of a knife, could be seen gleaming against his breast, held behind a leathern waste-belt.

On stepping forth from the cavern he stands for a time with eyes fixed on the trio of conspirators. He can see them but indistinctly, while they can not see him at all; his figure showing no outline against the dark background of the cavern's mouth.

And afterward, as he moves along the cliff, keeping close in, its shadow sufficiently shields him from their view. Still no chance of their seeing him, after he has crouched into a cranny close to the grotto's entrance; which he has done while the three schemers still stand, heads together.

In the obscure niche he now occupies no light falls upon his face. If there were it would show it to be that of Harry Blew; and, as oft before, with an expression upon it not easily interpreted. With thought of what has passed, and what threatens to come—contemplating the present, looking at Gil Gomez and Jose Hernandez, and recollecting what they have just said—knowing their intent, and taking it for granted that he, Harry Blew, knows or guesses it, then might be understood what is passing in his mind, causing this strange expression on his features. It must be jealousy. Can it be aught else?

No one can tell, save himself. For there is none to see, much less read it.

If it be jealousy, there is that before his eyes which will surely intensify it. Crouching in the darkness, he observes the three men separate, having closed their whispered colloquy.

Velarde resumes his seat upon the rock; while Gomez and Hernandez, turning away from him, stride toward the grotto, like two Tarquins about to invade the sleep of virginal innocence.

CHAPTER LXIV.

A DREAD RECOGNITION.

THE occupants of the grotto are in darkness, though not yet asleep.

To them repose is impossible. It can only come when mental suffering has exhausted mental strength, till nature calls for its restoration.

They have experienced the keenest anguish, passed through its first excited throes, and now in its second stage are calmer.

But it is the calm of despair, mingled with a deep, deadening grief. One mourns a father murdered, the other almost equally grieves for him who is her grandfather. They have no doubt that he is dead. How could they? While in the boat they heard

their captors speaking about the scuttling of the ship, both well knowing what that meant.

Long ago, then, must she have gone to the bottom of the sea with the living left aboard, perhaps only dead bodies. For they first must have murdered them. No matter now. The bereaved ones do not shape conjectures about how death has come to him dear to them. Too horrid to dwell on such details. Enough to know they are bereft—and more than enough to reflect that they are themselves threatened with a fate on which they dare not dwell.

They do not need telling why the barque has been abandoned. Though hindered from seeing they have heard. While the boat was being loaded with the gold-dust, enough speech passed among the pirates to acquaint them with what was carried on. Cupidity has been the cause of the crime. A conspiracy among the sailors. A scheme to plunder the ship. It has succeeded; it is done!

But all is not yet over. Would that it were so!

There is something still to come; that which thrills them to think of.

What is to be their own fate? In what form are they to be afflicted?

They can not tell, nor guess. They are already suffering affliction too great to permit of their reflecting clearly or calmly.

But in the midst of vague fears, there is one that assumes shape too well defined, with dark shade filling up the outlines. It is the same of which Carmen was speaking when seized. She again returns to it, saying:

"Inez, I am now almost sure we are not in the hands of strangers. What has happened, and those voices we have heard, tell me my suspicions have been too true."

"Heaven help us if it be so!"

"You may say that, *sobrina*. Yes; Heaven help us! Even from pirates we might have expected some mercy. From these we must look for none. For if it be them, it has not been our gold that has tempted them to take all these pains. *Ay de mí*, Mother of God! what will become of us?"

The interrogatory is not answered, or only by a sigh. The niece, like her aunt, is silenced, both giving way to the crushing weight of wretchedness that borders upon despair.

After a time they again exchange speech, seeking counsel of one another. Is there no hope, no hand to help, no one to whom they can turn in this hour of dread ordeal?

No—none!

The American sailor, he too has proved faithless—to all appearance chief of the traitorous crew!

For long time have they been mystified by the behavior of this man. During the early days of the voyage, they had approached him, endeavoring to draw him into conversation about Crozier and Cadwallader. To their surprise, as also chagrin, they found him reserved, reticent, or giving evasive answers, at the same time treating them with due respect. Once or twice he had given a hint of extending protection, as if to fortify them against some future contingency they might have to fear. Some danger of the sea, storm or shipwreck was all they could think of, little dreaming of the revolt that has arisen. Now they are no longer mystified about the man's behavior. His treachery has made all clear. Those words of respect and promise were but meant to allay suspicion, and have proved him a double traitor.

They can look for no help nor hope from Harry Blew. Nor from any one else. Every human being seems to have abandoned them.

Has God?

"Let us pray to Him!" says Carmen, after indulging hopeless thoughts, and exchanging fruitless counsels.

"Yes," answers Inez. "He only can help us now."

They kneel side by side on the hard stony floor of the grotto, and send up their voices in earnest prayer. They first entreat the Holy Virgin that the life of him dear to them may yet be spared; then invoke her protection against a danger both dread more than death. They pray in trembling accents, but with a fervor eloquent through very fear. Saying "Amen," they make the sign of the cross. It is done in darkness, God alone seeing it.

As their hands drop from the gesture, and while they are still in a kneeling attitude, a voice is heard outside, that suddenly stays their hopes from Heaven, recalling them to earthly fears.

There are voices of men in conversation; the same as saluted them when seized on the ship, awakening wild recollections in the minds of both.

They have no time now to talk of this, or anything else. Before they can exchange another word the piece of sail-cloth spread across the entrance is pushed aside, and two men, passing past it, stand inside the grotto.

Soon as entering one of them says:

"*Señoritas!* we must ask pardon for making a somewhat untimely call, which circumstances render imperative. It's to be hoped, however, you won't stand upon such stiff ceremony with us as you did on a certain occasion when we had the honor of paying our respects to you!"

After this singular peroration the speaker pauses to see what may be the effect of the speech. As this can not be gathered from any reply, since none is vouchsafed, he continues:

"Dona Carmen Montijo! you and I are old acquaintances, though it may be you don't remember my voice. With the sound of the sea so long echoing in your ears I can hardly think it strange you should not. Perhaps the sense of sight will prove more effectual in recalling an old friend; let me give you something to assist it."

Saying this, the speaker holds out a lantern hitherto concealed under his cloak. As it flashes its coruscations around the little cave, four forms are seen beneath the sparkling stalactites.

They are all erect; for at the intrusion the girls have sprung to their feet under an apprehension of immediate danger. Upon the faces of all the light shines clear; and fronting her, Carmen Montijo sees, too surely recognizing, Francisco De Lara, while in her *vis-a-vis* Inez Alvarez identifies Faustino Calderon.

CHAPTER LXV.

DEATH OR DISHONOR.

THE captive girls stand confronting the intruders, both sensibly trembling.

It is but the realization of forebodings long felt. Before them are their rejected suitors. Not disguised in sailor garb, but in the showy Californian costume—the same as worn by them on that day when De Lara rolled in the dust of the Dolores road. Now that they are in his power, he feels his triumph complete; and, in exalted strain, he continues:

"Senoritas, you see we have come together again. Surprised at our presence, are you not? Perhaps a little annoyed?"

There is no reply to this taunting speech. "Well, if you won't answer me, I'll take it for granted you are. And you look alarmed, too? You've no need to be that."

"No, indeed," indorses Calderon; "I assure you, ladies, we mean you no harm. None whatever." "On the contrary," goes on De Lara, "only good. We have nothing but favors for you."

"Don Francisco de Lara," says Carmen, at length breaking silence, and speaking in a tone of piteous expostulation, "and you, Don Faustino Calderon, why have you committed this crime? What injury have we ever done you?"

"Crime! Not so fast, fair Carmen. There's been no crime committed."

"No crime! *Santisima!* My father—my father!"

"Don't be uneasy about him. He's safe enough."

"Safe! He is dead! *Dios de mi alma!*"

Inez joins in the despairing exclamations.

"No—no! that's all nonsense!" protests the pirate, adding falsehood to his sin of deeper dye. "Don Gregorio is not dead; only gone off on a voyage by himself. But come, senoritas! let's drop that subject and talk of yourselves. You ask what injury you've done us. Faustino Calderon may answer for himself to the fair Inez. To you, Dona Carmen, I shall make reply. But we may as well confer privately."

Saying this, he takes hold of Carmen's wrist, and leads her aside, Calderon conducting Inez in the opposite direction.

When the whole length of the grotto is between the two pairs, De Lara resumes:

"Yes, Carmen Montijo, you have done me injury, a double injury I may call it."

"How, sir?" she asks, tearing her hand from his grasp, and flinging him off with a disdainful gesture.

"How? Why, in making me love you, by leading me to believe you loved me."

"You speak falsely, señor; I never did so!"

"You did; you did. It is you who speak false, thus denying it. That is the first wrong I have to reproach you with. The second, your casting me off, as you supposed you had done. Not so, as you see now. We're together again; never more to part. At least not till I've had satisfaction for every thing that's passed. I once hinted, I now tell you plainly, you've made a mistake in trifling with Francisco de Lara."

"I never trifled with you! *Dios mio!* What does this mean? Man, if you be a man, have mercy! Oh! What would you—what would you?"

"Nothing to call for such distracted entreaties. On the contrary, I've brought you here—for I won't deny that it is I who have done it—to grant favors instead of satisfying resentments. What I intend for you I hope you will appreciate. To shorten explanations, and come to the point, I want you for my wife—want, and will have you."

"Your wife!"

"Yes, my wife! You needn't look surprised, nor counterfeit feeling it. Idle for you to make opposition. I've determined upon it. Carmen Montijo! you must marry me."

"Marry the murderer of my father! Sooner than do that you shall also be mine. Wretch! I am in your power. You can kill me now."

"I know I can, without your telling me. But I don't intend killing you. On the contrary, I shall take care that you live until I've tried what sort of a wife you'll make. If you prove a good one, and fairly affectionate, we two may lead a happy life, notwithstanding the little unpleasantness that is between us. If not, and our wedded bondage prove uncongenial, why, then, I may release you in the way you wish, or any other that seems suitable. After the honeymoon, you shall have your choice. Now, senorita, those are my conditions. I hope you find them fair enough."

Carmen Montijo makes no reply.

The proud girl was dumb, partly from indignation, partly from the knowledge that rejoinder would be idle. But, while angry to the utmost, she almost trembles at the alternative offered to her imagination. Death or dishonor; this if she marry the murderer of her father; that if she refuse him.

In the same cynical strain the ruffian repeats his proposal, again closing it with a threat.

She is at length stung to reply; in short speech, but with wild, despairing accent. But two words, twice pronounced.

"Kill me! Kill me!"

Almost at the same time does Inez answer her cowardly suitor, who, in the opposite end of the cave, has alike brought her to bay.

After the dual response there is a short interval of silence. Then De Lara, speaking for both, says:

"Senoritas, we shall leave you now; you can go to sleep without fear of further solicitation. No doubt, after a night's rest, you'll awake to a more sensible view of things in general, and the situation as it stands. Of one thing be assured: that there's no chance of your escaping from your present captivity unless by consenting to change your names. And if you don't consent, they'll be changed all the same. Yes, Carmen Montijo, before another week passes over your pretty head, you shall be addressed as Dona Carmen de Lara."

"And you, Senorita Alvarez, will be called Dona Inez Calderon. No need for you to feel dishonored by a name among the best in California—noble as your own. Ay! or any other in Spain."

"*Hasta mañana, senoritas!*" salutes De Lara, preparing to take leave. "*Bue, o noche!*"

Calderon repeating the same formula, they turn toward the entrance of the cave, lift up the piece of suspended sail-cloth, and pass out into the night.

They have taken the lamp along with them, again leaving the grotto in darkness.

The girls grope their way till they come in contact. When, closing in mutual embrace, they sink together upon their knees, and silently resign themselves to prayer.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE ABANDONED BARQUE.

ANOTHER day dawns, another sun shines upon the South Sea.

As the golden orb mounts over the crest of the Central American Cordillera, at a single bound its beams go broad across the Pacific like a lamp held aloft flashing its light afar.

Many degrees of longitude, many geographical miles of ocean surface receive simultaneous illumination, in an instant turning night into day.

One placed upon a high promontory, and looking west over that vast wilderness of water, would, in all probability, see on its shining expanse objects that gladdened not the eyes of Bilbao. In his day only the rude Indian *bolza*, or frail *paragua*, fearing to venture far out, stole timidly along the shore. Now may be seen running *au large*, big ships, with broad white sails, and at intervals the long, black hull of a steamer, thick smoke vomited forth from her iron funnels, gradually growing thinner as it spreads wakeward over the water.

Not always can these be seen; for the commerce of the Pacific coast is slight compared with that carried on along the eastern side of the Atlantic, and the ships passing north and south fewer and further between.

On this morning none are observed steering either way; and but one in any direction. This one is standing on a different tack, westward toward mid-ocean.

As the sun, shining over the crest of the central Cordillera, strikes upon Punta Marioto, she can just be descried from this high headland, her spread canvas appearing a white speck, not bigger than the wings of a sea-gull extended in full flight. Still through a telescope may be told—supposing the observer to be a seaman—that her sails are spread against polacca masts; moreover, that those on the mizzen are not square set, but fore and aft, proclaiming her to be a barque.

Although looking upon her stern to where a name is legibly lettered, the observer will not be able to make this out. She is too far off, and still going further, she will soon disappear from the field of any glass that might be regarding her from the shore. She does in fact disappear just as the sun strikes the sea, gliding on over the twilight border between night and day.

Gazing at her through no glass, but with the omniscient eye of the author, we see that she is a barque, with all canvas out, even to stun'sails.

It is no surprise to see her decks deserted, not even a steersman at the wheel. To all appearance no living being aboard, save two monstrous counterfeits of humanity covered with bistre-colored hair. Nor more to find her fore-castle empty, with sailors' togs strewn over its floor. Nothing to astonish us, on glancing into the galley, there to behold a black man seated upon a bench, who does not rise to receive us. Nor yet descending to her cabin to see a table well spread, with a guest at each end of it, both sitting stiff on their chairs, the features fixed in an expression of stark, staring agony.

Strange as are these spectacles they do not surprise us. For we know their nature, as their history, from initial to now.

They are aboard the Chilian barque, abandoned the night before, and sent sailing out to sea. And now that the day has dawned, the red sunbeams strike against her stern and light up the lettering, EL CONDOR—VALPARAISO. She is still sailing on—on—on.

Simultaneous with the sunrise she has lost sight of land, and may never more see it. Nor aught save sea and sky, with the rare denizens of both, growing rarer as she glides further into the great South Sea, on whose broad bosom she may beat about for days, weeks, months—ay, forever—without seeing ship, or being seen by human eye.

This reflection, with others equally cheerless, and some more painful, passes through the minds of the two men, who sit constrained at her cabin table. For now that the night is passed, and no one comes to relieve them, they comprehend their situation in all its dread reality.

A fearful night have they passed. Over and over have they made efforts to release themselves, twisting their arms and bodies about far as the lashings would allow, wriggling and wrenching till the cords have cut through their skin. Only to discover that they could not free themselves from their fastenings.

What chance of any one coming to help them? Often during the night did they ask this question—either in soliloquy, or of one another. Once had they a hope, as they heard shouts upon deck. Recognizing the voice of the negro:

"Thank Heaven! he has remained faithful," both mentally exclaimed, every moment expecting to hear his footstep descending the stair.

But continuing to listen, their hearts sunk within them. The exclamations sounded distant as ever, their long-drawn monotone proclaiming them cries of distress; the natural deduction that the negro, like themselves, was fast bound, in some part of the vessel forward.

Proof of it, as their own shouts sent up in agony, received only response in the same strain. Still further as time passed and he appeared not, his cries changing to low moanings, heard only indistinctly, and at long intervals apart.

Ceasing to writhe, knowing it idle to call any longer for help, exhausted by their struggles, they at length gave way, falling into a stupor of despair that soon became sleep. A deep, dead slumber, in which their misery was for the moment forgotten.

Day stealing through the cabin windows saw them in this state, like two men after a night's debauch, who, unable to stagger to their beds, had fallen asleep in their chairs. Very different the fact; as their reflections on awaking. They had no thought of stretching forth their hands to grasp the half-emptied glasses. The perfume of the fine fruits, and the bouquet of the choice wines had no attraction for them then. And if they had, it would have been all the same. Either was as much beyond their reach as if set on a table ten thousand miles away.

That awaking brought back no sensual thought or instinct, only keen mental agony.

It led to a renewal of their efforts to release themselves, with a reiteration of their shouts for help—these responded to as before by cries telling of dis-

tress on deck. That and the reverberations of their own voices through the hollow timbers of the ship.

And now that the sun shines well in through the cabin windows, they are again silent; its light showing Don Gregorio the open, empty lockers, the two unoccupied chairs, the fan and the scarf, all keenly recalling his double loss—driving him into the very depths of despair.

Lautanas, alike wretched, though at intervals still making effort to release himself, each more faint and with feebleness strength, he at length too yielding to the inevitable, to the protraction of despair.

Alone in the caboose, the negro has also ceased crying out, and desisted from his struggles. Bound upon the bench, he sits opposite the galley fire, now gone out, his wrinkled visage immobile as the griffin that grins *vis-a-vis* upon the casting of the grate.

No sounds are heard save the singing of the breeze as it strikes the rigging ropes, and whips against the sails. Blowing fresh it belies them out into a taut curvature, carrying the Condor away—still further away—into the wilderness of ocean.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE GOLD-DUST DIVIDED.

THE same sun that shines upon the abandoned barque has first flashed upon the cliffs of the Vera-guan coast.

The golden beams, slanting over their crest, light up a little bay between two projecting shoulders of rock. It is a bight or cove, of horse-shoe shape, backed by the beetling precipice. A ledge of dike, sea-washed and weed-covered, trends across its entrance, with a gate-like opening in the center, through which at high tide the sea flows in. But never quite up to the inner end of the bay or the base of the encircling cliff. It may have done so in days long past—a different geological era.

Now there is a terrace recording the ancient tide-mark, and several feet above the present sea level. It is only an acre or two in extent, occupying the inner concavity of the cave. From it the sand-beach is not visible, or but a small portion of it through the portal that admits the tidal flow. Elsewhere can be seen only the sea, outside the surf, with the reef breakers at more than a mile's distance beyond.

Turning to the cliff the view is bounded by a facade of rock, curving all round, black, scarred and grim. Only in the center of its concavity the blue sky dips a little lower, telling of a gorge going upward.

A channel cut through the terrace dividing it in twain, is the track of a rivulet that descends through the gorge. But though rain has fallen on the night before, now at sunrise not a drop of water is in its bed.

Such is the place where the late crew of the Chilian barque have rowed her pinnace ashore—as disclosed on the morning after by the sun looking over the crest of the cliff.

But little is seen to discover the presence of the pirates, only a man seated upon a stone, nodding as if asleep, at intervals awaking with a start, and spasmodically yawning at a gun that leans between his legs, again giving way to irresistible slumber, the effect of a late drunken debauch. He would be but a poor sentinel were there need for vigilance. Seemingly there is none. No enemy is near: no human being in sight save himself. The only animate objects are the sea-birds, that, winging their way along the face of the cliff, salute him with an occasional scream, surprised at his presence in a spot hitherto sacred to themselves.

The day fairly on, he springs to his feet; then going to the head of a cave close by, and stopping in front of it, he cries out:

"Inside there, mates! Sun's up—time to be stirring."

Seeing him in motion, and hearing his hail, the gulls gather, and swoop around his head in continuous screaming, in larger numbers and more strident cries as his comrades issue out of the cave.

One after another they step forth, yawning and stretching their arms.

The first, looking seaward, proposes to refresh himself by a plunge in the surf, and for this purpose starts for the beach. The others, taken with the idea, follow in twos and threes, till in a string, all are seen descending toward the strand. To reach this, it is necessary for them to pass through the gap in the transverse ledge, which the tide, now out, enables them to do.

He who leads having gone through it, soon as he gets view of the beach, suddenly stops as he does so, sending back a shout. It is a cry of surprise, followed by the words:

"By —, the boat's gone!"

The announcement so profanely made should cause them apprehension. It would if they knew the consequences. Ignorant of them, they make but a light matter of it; one, who speaks their mind, responding with like profanity:

"Let her go, and be cursed to it! We want no boat now!"

"A dozen horses would be more to our purpose," suggests a second, "or mules, for that matter."

"A dozen monkeys would do," adds a third, accompanying his remark with a loud laugh.

"It'll take about that many to pack our possibilities."

"What's become of the old pinnace, anyhow?" asks one in sober strain, as having passed through the rock's portal, they all stand scanning the strand. They remember the place where they landed and left the boat; they see it is not there.

"Has any one made away with it?"

The question is asked and instantly answered, one saying no. Striker, the man who first missed it, vouchsafes an explanation of its disappearance.

"The tide goin' out's taken it along. It's goed to bits on them their breakers."

All remember that the boat was not moored, but left with painter loose. No wonder it went adrift.

Caring little, indeed nothing, they think of it no longer.

Stripping, they plunge into the surf, and bathe their bodies with delight.

Then returning to the cavern, they array themselves in garments better befitting the life they intend leading, their sailor-clothes cast off to be abandoned. Most have a suit of "go-shores," brought with them from the barque. The four

Spaniards appear in Mexican costume, for three of them are Californians, Gomez, *alias* De Lara, being the exception. Like Calderon under the pseudonym of Hernandez, Padillo and Velarde are natives of San Francisco. Their real names, as may be surmised, are respectively Rocas and Lozada.

Over the sword the Frenchman, La Crosse, struts in a dress befitting the Boulevards of Paris. The Dane and Dutchman have also rigged themselves according to the style of their respective nations, while the two nameless men remain nondescripts, even in their changed attire. The three of Anglo-Saxon race retain the apparel of the sea; not from preference, but because of their having no other at hand. Harry Blew sticks to his pea-jacket of pilot-cloth, while Striker is in oiled canvas, and Davis in ducks and Guernsey shirt.

Their toilets complete, all come together to talk of future action.

Breakfast has been already eaten; cold though cooked provisions brought away from the barque. And now comes the matter of greatest moment—the spoils.

Some may be thinking of another matter—are; but the majority have their minds on the division of the gold-dust.

It is done in little time, and with no great trouble. The bags containing it are ripped open, and the metal is measured out in a boat's pannikin, a like number of measures apportioned to each, round and round.

In money-value no one knows the exact amount of his share. Enough satisfaction that it is as much as he can carry, and for easier transport will require distribution into every pocket on his person.

After each has appropriated his pile, a short time is spent in packing up and preparing for the inland journey. About this arises the question what way ought they to make it? It has already been resolved to strike for the city of Santiago. Are they to separate into several traveling parties, or go all together?

The former plan is proposed by Gomez, and supported by Padillo, Hernandez, and Velarde. Gomez gives the reason:

A large party such as they traveling afoot, along roads where pedestrians are never by any chance encountered, can not fail to excite curiosity. It would cause questioning, perhaps lead to their being arrested, and taken before some *alcalde* or *jefe de paz*. If so, what story can they tell?

On the other hand, there will be the chance of coming in contact with Indians; and as some of those on the Veraguan coast are reputed "Indios bravos," having preserved their independence, and along with it their instinctive hostility to the whites, an encounter with the savages might be even more dangerous than with civilized men. Straggling along in squads of two or three they would run the risk of getting captured or killed, perhaps tortured!

This is the suggestion of Harry Blew; not favorably received. Only Davis and Striker stand out for it. All the others go against; Gomez ridiculing the idea of danger from the red-men; at the same time enlarging on that to be apprehended from whites. As the majority of the robbers—outlaws every one—have more reason to fear civilized men than the so-called savage, it ends in their deciding for separation. They can come together again in Santiago, if they choose, or not if chance, for good or ill, so determine. They are all amply provided for playing an independent part of the drama of their future lives; and with this pleasant prospect they can part company without a sigh of regret.

And now that the ruffian band is ready to break up, what more is to be done?

Ah! there is something yet. Still another question to be discussed, and determined. To most of them it is a matter of not much—though to others of all consequence. To two in particular. For to them it has been the source, the primary motive, the true stimulus to all their iniquitous action. In a word it is the *women*!

CHAPTER LXVIII.

A DELICATE SUBJECT.

The captives—how are they to be disposed? It is not Gomez who asks the question; nor yet Hernandez, nor any one.

On the subject all have been hitherto silent, as if shy of approaching it. And all remain so, not a word about it passing their lips, not a sign to betray their intentions.

The girls are still within the grotto, the sail-cloth drawn across screening them from sight. They see not what is passing outside, no more do they hear. They have had their breakfast served to them; but no word of warning as to what they may expect after. They but know what has been told them by De Lara and Calderon, and something communicated later by the sailor Blew.

Being Spanish, a sort of understanding gains ground that they are to go with those who speak their own tongue. Or rather they wish them, for the four Spaniards have signified their intention to remain on the sea-shore, leaving the others to proceed inland. Only for a day, to give ostensible distinctness to the separate traveling parties, and so safety to all.

Beyond this there has been nothing mentioned, save certain hints thrown out from time to time, by Gomez and Hernandez asserting their claim to this particular portion of the spoils; they have spoken of a former acquaintance with the ladies in San Francisco, and a chapter of love-making alluded to. In short, they have given out that the girls are old sweethearts. This title, if need be, they now intend to urge, as a claim for their special appropriation.

No one has yet disputed it, since no one has spoken on the subject. But now that it is before them, and must be definitely settled, it becomes clear, every moment clearer, that it is not to be tacitly conceded, but, on the contrary, keenly and passionately contested. There is an electricity in the air that tells this; and there is a fixed expression on the faces of two men—not Gomez and Hernandez—which proclaims their determination also to claim the captives. These men are Harry Blew and Bill Davis, who, standing apart, have as yet made no preparation for the inland journey; but seem as if they also intended to stay by the sea-shore. With a fiery glance in their eyes, they stand conferring together; at the same time their attitude of earnest attention shows they are expecting some one to speak.

The very reticence hitherto observed shows that the subject is deemed serious—the ground delicate and dangerous. For several minutes more no one ventures to tread on it.

Some appear to busy themselves about their packs, while others stand watching La Crosse, who has gone up the gorge to make a reconnaissance, see how things show inland, and whether the coast is clear.

There is one who chafes at the inaction, and resolves to bring it to an end.

This is Jack Striker, the "Sydney duck," least of all given to shilly-shallying or sentimentalism. First uttering a shout to attract general attention, he bursts out:

"Well, chums! what to be done wi' the wimmin'?"

"Oh! they," answers Gomez, in a drawing tone, and with an affectation of indifference. "You've got nothing to do with them, and need not take any trouble. They go with us, Senor Hernandez and myself."

"Do they, indeed?" sharply interrogates Harry Blew.

"Of course," answers Gomez, Hernandez putting in a word to the same import.

"I don't see any of course about it," rejoins Blew.

"And more'n that, I'll be cursed if they do go wi' ye—leastwise, not so cheap as ye think for."

"Maldita! what do you mean?" asks the Spaniard, kindling with anger, at the same time showing a certain uneasiness.

"No use your losin' temper, Gil Gomez. Your Spanish cursin' ain't goin' to scare me. Therefore, ye may as well keep cool. By doin' that, an' listenin', you'll larn what I mean. The which is, that you an' Hernandez have no more right to them creeturs in the cave than any o' the rest o' us. Just as it's been with the gold, so ought it to be with the girls. In course we can't divide them all round; but that's no reason why any two should take 'em, so long's any other two wants 'em as well. Now I want one o' them."

"I, too!"

It is Davis who thus promptly announces himself a candidate.

"Yes," continues Blew. "And though I may be a bit older than yourself, Mr. Gomez, and not quite so grand a gentleman, I can like a pretty wench just as well as you. I've taken a fancy to the one wi' the tortoise-shell hair, an' ain't goin' to surrender her in the slack way you appear to wish."

"Glad to hear it," says Davis. "Blew, as I'm for the black one, there's no rivalry between us. Her I mean to have, unless some better man can hinder me."

"Well," says Striker, "as I first put the questyun, I suppose I'll be allowed to gi'e an opeenyun."

None saying nay, the ex-convict proceeds.

"As to any one hev'in' a special claim to them wimmin', nobody has, an' nobody could have. About that Blew's right, an' so's Bill. Now, since the thing's disputed, it oughter be settled in a fair an' square fashion—"

"You needn't waste your breath," interrupts Gomez. "I admit no dispute in the matter. If these gentlemen insist, there's but one way of settling. One of these ladies is my sweetheart—was before I ever saw any of you. Senor Hernandez can say the same of the other."

"It's a lie!" cries Blew, confronting the slanderer, and looking him straight in the face. "A lie, Gil Gomez, from the bottom o' your black heart; the ladies never was any thing to such as you!"

"Enough!" exclaims De Lara, now red with rage.

"No man can give me the lie and live after."

"I'll live long enough to see you under ground, or, what's more like, hangin' wi' your throat in a halter. Don't make any mistake, shipmate; I can shoot straight as you."

"Avast there!" calls Striker to Gomez, seeing the latter about to draw his pistol. "Hands off o' that weepun! If there must be a fight, it shall be a fair one."

While speaking, Striker steps between the two men, staying their encounter.

CHAPTER LXIX.

A DUEL TO THE DEATH.

"Let the fight be a fair one!"

So demand several voices as the pirate crew comes clustering around the intending combatants.

"Look here, shipmates!" continues Striker, still standing between the two angry men, and alternately eying them. "What's the use o' spillin' blood about it, may be killin' one the other? all for the sake o' a pair of petticoats, or a kuppel o' pairs eyther. Take my advice, an' settle the thing in a pacifical way. Maybe ye will, after ye've heerd' what I intend proposin', which, I dar' say, 'll be satisfactory to all."

"What is it, Jack?" asks one of the outsiders.

"First, then, I'm a-goin' to make the observashun that fightin' a'n't the way to get them weemen, whoever may be fools enough to fight for 'em. There's somethin' to be did besides."

"Explain yourself, old Sydney; what's to be done besides?"

"The girls has got to be paid for as well as fit for."

"How?"

"How! What humbuggin' nonsense to ask! Hain't we all equal shares in 'em? Coorse we have. Therefore them as wants 'em bad, won't object to payin'. Their appear to be four candydates in the field, and cur'us enough they're set in pairs, two for each o' the seenyoritas. Now, 'thout refarrin' to any fightin' that's to be done, I say that eyther as eventually gits a gal, shed pay a considerashun o' gold-dust all round to the rest o' us—say a pannikin apiece. That's what Jack Striker first proposes."

"It's fair," says one.

"Nothing more than our rights," asserts a second.

"I agree to it," says Harry Blew.

"I too," adds Davis.

Gomez gives assent by a disdainful nod, Hernandez imitating the action. In fear of losing adherents, neither dare refuse.

"What more have you to say?" asks one, recalling Striker to his promise of further proposals.

"Not much, only I think it be a pity, after our bein' so long in harmony together, we can't part same way. Weemen's allers been a bother ever since I've knowed 'em; an' I s'pose they'll continue so to the end o' the chapter, an' the end o' some lives here."

I repeat, that it are a pity we shed have to wind up wi' a quarrel, when blood's bound to be spilt. Now, why can't it be settled without that? I think I know of a way."

"What way?"

"Leave it to the woomen themselves; gi'e them the choice o' who they'd like to go along wi'; same time lettin' 'em understan' they've got to choose one or t'other. Let 'em take their pick, an' after, ther's to be no more disputin'. That's the law in the Austraylin bush, when we've a case o' this kind, and every bush-ranger has to 'bide by it. Why shouldn't it be the same here?"

"Why shouldn't it? It's a good law—just and fair for all."

"I consent to it," says Harry Blew, drawing back, as if not sure of the result, but willing to submit to what may be the wish of the majority. "I may not be so young or good-lookin' as Mr. Gomez," he adds. "I know I ain't eyther. Still, I'll take my chance. If she I love and lay claim to, pronounces against me, I promise to stand aside, and say ne'er another word, much less care to fight for her. She may go wi' Gomez, an' take my blessin' for both."

"Bravo, Blew! You talk like an honest man. Don't be afraid; we'll stand by you."

Several say this.

"Comrades!" says Davis, "I place myself in your hands. If my girl goes against me, I'm willing to give her up, same as Blew."

What about Gomez and Hernandez? What answer will they make to the proposed peaceful compromise? All eyes are turned on them, every one awaiting it.

Gomez gives it, his eyes flash'ng fire as he speaks. Hitherto he has been holding his anger in restraint. Now it breaks out, poured forth like lava from a burning mountain.

"Carajo!" he cries. "I've been listening a long time to talk—taking it too coolly. Cursed idle talk, all of it; yours, Mr. Striker, especially. What care we about your ways in the Australian bush? They won't hold good with me. My style of settlin' disputes is this, or this."

He touches his pistol butt, and the hilt of the *machete* hanging against his hip. "Mr. Blew may have his choice."

"All right!" retorts Blew. "I'm good for a bout wi' eyther, and don't care a toss which. Pistols at six paces, or my cutlass against that thing of yours. Both if you like."

"Both be it. That's best; and we'll make the end sure. Get ready, and quick, for I intend killing you."

"Say you intend trying. I'm ready now. You may begin soon's you feel disposed."

"And I'm ready for you, sir," says Davis, confronting Hernandez. "Knives, pistol, tomahawks, any thing you please."

Hernandez hangs back, as though he would rather decline the proposed combat *a l'outrance*.

"No, Bill," exclaims Striker, interring. "One fight at a time. When Blew and Gomez hev got through, then you can gi'e the other his change, if so be he wants to hev it."

Hernandez appears gratified with the speech, dis-regarding the innuendo. He had no thought it would come to this, and looks as if he would surrender up his sweetheart without striking a blow. He makes no rejoinder, but shrinks back like a craven.

"Yes; one fight at a time!" urge the others, indorsing the *dictum* of Striker.

It is the demand of the majority, and the minority concedes it.

All know it is to be a duel to the death. A glance at the antagonists, at their angry eyes and determined attitudes, makes this sure. On that lone sea beach, one of the two will soon sleep his last sleep; it may be both.

The preliminaries are speedily arranged. Under the circumstances and between such adversaries, there are but few punctilios of ceremony to be satisfied; only the rough code of honor common among robbers of all climes.

No seconds are chosen or spoken of. All on the ground are to act as such, and at once proceed to business.

Some mark and measure the distance, stepping it between two stones. Others examine the pistols, see that both are loaded with ball-cartridge, and carefully capped.

The fight is to be with Colt's six-shooters, navy size. Each combatant chances to have one of this pattern. They are to commence firing at twelve paces apart, and fire away, closing quick as either chooses. If neither fall to the shots, then to finish up with the steel.

The captives inside the cave are ignorant of what is going on. Little dream they of the red tragedy soon to be enacted near, or how much they may be affected by its result. It is, indeed, to them the chance of a contrasting destiny.

The combatants have taken stand by the stones, placed twelve paces apart. Blew, having stripped off his pilot-cloth coat, is in his shirt-sleeves. These rolled up to the elbow show ranges of tattooing, red and blue; ships, anchors, stars, crosses, crescents and sweethearts, a perfect *palimpsest* of pictorial record. They show also muscles lying along the arm like sennit cords upon a stay. Should the shots fail, that arm promises well for wielding the cutlass; and if those fingers clutch his antagonist's throat, the struggle will be a short one.

No weak adversary will he meet in Gil Gomez. He, too, has thrown aside his outer garments—the scarlet cloak and heavy hat, hitherto shading his features. He does not need stripping to the shirt-sleeves; the light *jaqueta* of velvet in no way incumbers him. Fitting like a glove, it displays arms of no ordinary strength, with a body in symmetrical correspondence.

A duel between two such gladiators—and to the death—should be a spectacle worth witnessing. It might be painful; for all that, fearfully interesting.

Those about to witness it seem to think so, as all stand silent, with breath bated, and eyes bent alternately on the two antagonists.

It has been already arranged that Striker is to give the signal, and the ex-convict, standing centrally outside the line of fire, is about to say a word that will set two men, mad as tigers, at one another—each with full determination to blaze away, cut down, and kill.

There is a moment of intense stillness, like the

ple shows on the surface of the sea. It is smooth as glass, while her sails hang loose and limp, giving an occasional clout against the masts. Beyond a doubt she is becalmed!

Through the open windows he can see all this, even at a league's distance. What is a league under the diaphanous skies of the central Pacific? For sighting objects, not so much as a mile in the misty atmosphere of northern seas.

Yes; the ship is becalmed and the chase may be given up. Noting the fact, and reflecting on the possible consequence, he is again despondent, and sits trembling in his chair.

But the barque! She too will be becalmed; must be from the same cause? Already she moves slowly, scarce making way.

And now, now she is motionless! He can tell it by looking at the glass rack and the lamps suspended overhead. They hang without the slightest oscillation.

Now the barque swings round and he loses sight of the ship. Through the windows he still beholds the sea, calm and blue, but vacant. No outline of hull, no expanded sails, no floating flag to keep glad his heart. It is darker than ever. Only for a time—a short half-hour. Then the barque, still swinging round, once more brings stern toward the ship, and the latter is again visible.

Something besides; a boat down in the water, and coming on between, and oar-blades flashing in the sun, dropping spray-drops like silver stars!

The barque eddying on, he sees the boat but a little while. But he is no longer apprehensive. Now certainly will he be saved!

And he looks no longer; only listens. Soon to hear words spoken in a strong, manly voice, to him sweeter than the most melodious music. It is the hail:—

"Barque, ahoy!"

In feeble accents he makes answer, once—twice—thrice. He desists, on thinking there is no chance of his being heard. For other voices, echoing along the Condor's deck, drown his; humanlike, though not human. Too oft has he been tantalized by the resemblance.

Amidst the chattering of the ourangs he again hears the hail:

"Barque, ahoy!"

He no longer essays response, knowing there is no need. He remains with mute lips but heart beating audibly. Its throbs can be heard all through the closed cabin. And no other noise; for the Chilian is unconscious of all, hanging limp in his lashings in stupor or sleep.

There is a dull thud as the boat strikes the side; then a sound of scrambling, and soon after footsteps on the deck. An interval of quiet broken by ejaculations, and some quick-muttered words. Then the footsteps nearer and nearer, as they come upon the quarter-deck, and clearer yet, descending the cabin stairs.

The handle is turned; the door thrown open; a swish of fresh air sweeps through the cuddy, long closed, two men entering along with it.

Don Gregorio does not at first see them, his back being turned toward the door. But he hears their breathing behind him, and with it a wild exclamation from both.

Wrenching his neck right and left, he sees two young men, one by each shoulder. They are in the uniform of naval officers, both known to him.

The sight should give him joy. It does, with many emotions besides. They are too much for his strength, too sorely tried. Overpowered, and uttering a faint cry, he becomes unconscious.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

CONJECTURES TOO TRUE.

It is Edward Crozier and William Cadwallader who have entered the Condor's cabin. For she is the polacca barque chased by a frigate, and that frigate is the Crusader. The cry simultaneously raised by the two young officers is one of strange intonation. Not surprise, but telling of a conjecture that has proved too truthful. Rather a dread presentiment. While in chase of the barque, as her national colors were made out, they had at first no thought of connecting her with the vessel which Don Gregorio Montijo had chartered for Panama. True they had heard that this was a Chilian vessel, and her skipper of that nation. But they had heard also that she was a *ship*, not a *barque*. And as among the many craft riding at anchor in San Francisco Bay, neither had noticed her, how should they think of identifying her with the chased polacca? Gradually, however, as the frigate drew closer, certain suspicions began to present themselves to Crozier's mind, painful, but yet so vague, he did not think them worthy of being communicated to his younger comrade. He remembered having seen a *polacca-masted* vessel in the harbor of San Francisco; besides that, she was a *ship*. As far as his recollections served, she was of the same size as that running before the frigate, and he could distinctly recall the fact of her flying the Chilian flag.

The peculiar style of her masting had drawn his attention to her. And while they were still pursuing the barque, and commenting upon the coincident reports of the brig and whaler about a crew clothed in skins, Crozier also recalled a statement strangely significant; Harry Blew had made it to one of the men who rowed Cadwallader ashore on the day the Crusader sailed. Blew had been aboard the Chilian, and, being asked by his old shipmate what sort of a crew she had, laughingly replied:

"Only a black man and two red ones."

Pressed for an explanation about the red men, he said they were a couple of *ourang outangs*.

Putting these odd data together, and comparing them, Crozier began to have an uneasy feeling as they followed the fleeing vessel. That she was a barque and not a ship meant little. As a seaman he knew how easy the conversion, and how often made.

When both vessels were becalmed, and an order for boarding was given by Captain Bracebridge, he had solicited the service, as had Cadwallader the leave to accompany him, the latter also feeling apprehensiveness from some words his friend had hastily spoken to him.

When both at length climbed the barque's side, saw the red monkeys on deck, and the black man in the galley, their apprehension became sharpened to a keen foreboding of misfortune.

Alas! proved true, as they entered the Condor's cabin, and there beheld its fulfillment.

The cry that escaped their lips came on the recognition of Don Gregorio Montijo. A second exclamation as they look on the two unoccupied chairs, a fan on the one, a scarf over the back of the other!

Almost a wail as rushing on they dash open the berth-rooms, and find all empty.

They turn toward the table for explanation, demanding, entreating it. Of the two men seated at it, one answers with a wild, Bedlamite laugh. They see he is insane!

The other answers not. Oh, God! is Don Gregorio dead?

They glide toward him, grasp table-knives, and cut the cords that have been confining him. Senseless, he sinks into their arms.

But he is not dead; only fainted. His pulse still feebly beats.

Crozier, leaving him in the hands of his comrade, rushes upon deck, and shouts to the cutter's crew to row back and bring the surgeon.

He sees Grunnet busy with the black man, also released from his fastenings. The coxswain is pouring rum down his throat, endeavoring to restore him.

Crozier stays not for this, but, in hurried strides, returns to the cabin.

With wine they wet Don Gregorio's lips—the wine so long standing untasted.

They open his teeth, and spill it between, glass after glass. Unconsciously drinking, his pulse grows stronger; his eyes sparkle with the light of reviving life.

Laid gently along the sofa, he is soon restored to consciousness, with sufficient strength to answer the questions eagerly asked. These are two; though simultaneous, almost echoes of one another.

"Where is Carmen? Where is Inez?"

"Gone!" he gasps out; "carried away by the—"

He does not finish the sentence. His breath fails him, and he seems again giving way, relapsing into the *syncope* of unconsciousness.

Fearing it, they refrain to question him further, but keep on administering restoratives. They give him more wine, making him also eat of the fruits found upon the table.

They set the skipper free, but soon see cause to regret it. He strides to and fro, flings his arms about in frenzied gesture, clutches at decanters, glasses, bottles, and breaks them against one another, or dashes them to atoms upon the floor. He needs restraining, and they do it, by shutting him up in his state-room.

Returning to Don Gregorio, they continue to nurse him, all the while wishing the surgeon soon to come.

A hail from the top of the stairs! It is Grunnet who gives it.

"Below there!"

He is going to announce the cutter returning from the frigate. It is almost too soon yet.

But no; it is not that. Something different; something to startle—to alarm them. Listening, they hear the coxswain's cry:

"Come on deck, Mr. Crozier! There's a bank o' black fog rollin' up. It's already close on the barque's starboard bow. It look like there's mischief in't; and I believe there be, gentlemen! For God's sake, come quick!"

CHAPTER LXXIV.

A STRUGGLE WITH THE STORM.

THE summons of the coxswain is too serious to be disregarded. Soon as hearing it the two officers hasten upon deck, leaving Don Gregorio reclined along the settee.

Glancing over the barque's starboard bow, they behold the sky black as Erebus. It is a fog-bank covering only a point or two of the compass, but as they stand regarding it, it lengthens along the horizon, at the same time rising higher against the heavens.

They can see that it is approaching, spreading over the ocean like a pall. And where it shadows the water, white flakes show themselves, which they know to be the froth churned by the sharp stroke of a wind-squall.

They do not stand idly gazing. All three recognize the threatening danger. They only cast a glance toward the frigate, and perceiving they can have no hope of help from her, at once take steps to save the barque.

"To the sheets!" shouts Crozier; "let fly all!"

At the command Cadwallader and the coxswain spring off to execute it, Crozier himself assisting. There are but the three to do the work. For the negro, recently released, has scarce strength to keep his feet. No help to be expected from him. Nor any one else.

But the three strong men, having confidence in their strength, do not despair. They see a squall approaching, and let fly every thing.

Working as if for life, they cast off sheets and halyards and let the canvas flap free. No time for clewing up or making snug. The sails must take their chance though they get split into shreds.

This actually occurs, and soon. Scarce have they blown free, when the barque is enveloped in the cloud, and the storm strikes against the sails. Luckily these are loose. If set, the masts would have gone by the board, or the vessel on her beam-ends.

Before her being struck Grunnet has grasped the wheel, and by Crozier's command brought her before the wind. To attempt laying to with her canvas in such condition would be to court danger—almost sure destruction. To scud seems the only hope for safety.

And away go they before the wind, which first coming in fitful puffs, soon becomes a full gale blowing in strong, sharp gusts, each rending a sail, till strips of canvas, like streamers, clout against masts, yards, and rigging.

Fortunately the barque well obeys her helm, while Crozier and Cadwallader manage to set a storm-stay and try-sail, thus helping to steady her.

During all this time, they have not thought of the frigate. Absorbed in the desperate endeavor to save the craft that carries them, they reflect not upon what may be their fate if separated from their own ship.

At length this reflection rises, in a form to appall them. The Crusader is out of sight—has been ever

since the commencement of the storm. They do not know the direction in which she may have sailed, or drifted; nor can they tell whether she has lain to, or, like themselves, scudded. If the latter, there is a hope she will follow the same course; and the fog lifting, be discerned.

Alas! it is more likely she will do the former. Well-manned, she can take in sail in good time, make all snug, and ride out the storm. Apprehending the peril of those sent aboard the barque, she will not forsake the place, but assuredly lie to.

Just as they have come to this conclusion, they hear a gun booming above the blast. They know it is the frigate firing to let them know her whereabouts. But although the sound reaches them with sufficient distinctness, they can not tell the direction. It is always so at sea in a fog.

Listening they hear it a second time, and soon after a third. Then again and again! Still distinct, but with the same uncertainty as to whence it comes. For the life of them, they can not determine the point of the compass whence it comes. Even if they knew this, it is questionable whether they dare steer the barque toward it; for the storm has now become a tempest, and it is touch and go to keep the Chilian vessel afloat.

Out of trim, she is tossed from wave to wave, shipping seas that threaten to engulf her, or wash everything overboard.

In this struggle as it were for life or death, they lose all hope of being able to keep company with the war-ship—all thought of it. It will be well if they can but save the barque from going to the bottom of the sea.

Again they hear the signal-gun, several times repeated. They are unable to answer or obtain benefit from it. Situated as they are, it seems sounding a farewell salute. Ay! it may be their death-knell!

Fainter and fainter falls the boom upon their ears; duller and duller at each successive detonation.

It tells that the distance between them and the frigate, instead of diminishing, increases. A thought sadly disheartening; but they can not help it.

They dare not put the barque about or in any way alter her course. They must keep scudding, though they may never see the Crusader again.

And now no longer do they hear the crash of her cannon. Whether from greater distance between, or the louder confusion of the storm, the signal gun can no more be distinguished amid its voices.

Throughout all the night the Condor scuds, tempest-tossed, shipping huge seas, yet throwing them off, and still keeping afloat. And as the morning sun shines in a bright sky, the gale goes down, and their struggle is for the time ended.

Not much of mutual congratulation passes between them. True, they are safe for the present. But their safety has been a chapter of chance, and they know it.

And what is their prospect for the future? They are alone upon the sea, hundreds of leagues from land, aboard a craft they may not be able to man age. All the more difficult with her sails torn to shreds. Even if these were sound, they have not the strength to set them. They are helpless; only a little better off than if in an open boat.

They are still in a position of real peril.

But they do not dwell upon it now. An emotion yet more painful is in their minds, and casting an other unrewarded glance over the ocean, they descend into the cabin to get more particulars of the tale of sadness, which almost maddens them.

CHAPTER LXXV.

A RECOVERED CARD.

TWELVE o'clock, noon.

The swell has nearly smoothed down, and the Condor is standing on a course.

The tattered sails still hang like streamers from her yards, but there are three sound and set, with which she can be worked. By good luck the main-sail chanced to be clewed up when the squall came on; and so is saved. The old negro having recovered strength enough to take charge of the steering-gear, the other three have managed to set it, as also to patch up the foresail, and bend on a new spanker found among the barque's spare stores.

With these she is not only kept on a course, but makes some way through the water. A brisk breeze that has sprung up since the subsiding of the storm, and from a different point, strikes her port quarter, driving her along good six knots to the hour. Crozier has set her course eastward. Not with any definite idea of the direction they should take, only that to the east lies the land—the continent of America.

He has determined to make for the port of Panama, in the hope of there finding the Crusader. There is little likelihood of encountering the frigate before. True, Captain Bracebridge is not the man to run away without making full search. But his chances of finding them are but one in a thousand; and failing, he will run on to the port of Panama, and there stay some time in the belief they may bring into it.

This the young officers conjecture.

It is now twelve M. and they are both on deck, Crozier with a sextant to his eye; Cadwallader poring over a chart spread out on the capstan head. It is the Condor's chart, and the sextant belongs to Captain Lautanas.

The Chilian skipper can give them no assistance in their attempt to determine the latitude. He is below in his little state-room locked up, lest in his delirium, still continuing, he might commit some suicidal act.

But the officers of an American man-of-war need no teaching how to take a sight, or read the logarithmic reckoning; and Crozier after "shooting the sun," and making a few figures on a slate, knows his position to a minute. The longitude he has already found by the barque's chronometer, and the latitude now determined, he cries out to him at the wheel:

"Starboard your helm, Grunnet! Give her another point! Keep her east by south; steady!"

This done, and the barque's head brought to the indicated course, Crozier knows she is standing straight for Panama.

Then turning to Cadwallader, he says:

"If all goes well, we should get there in less than four days. We might do it in three, if we could but set sail enough. No matter; old Bracebridge will be sure to stay for us. I wish that was all we have to

grieve about. Oh, God! to think they're gone, lost to us—lost forever!"

"Don't say that, Ned! There's still a hope of our finding them."

"And found, what then? Ah, Will! I don't wish to speak of it; I daren't trust myself to think of it. Carmen Montijo—my Carmen—captured to a crew of pirates! I can see her grasped by some hulking fellow, disheveled, screaming as he draws her to his brutal embrace! Oh, God! oh, God!"

Cadwallader is silent. He suffers the same, thinking of his line.

For a time the picture remains before their minds, dark as their fears and gloomiest fancies can paint it.

Then shoots across it a ray of light, sinister, but sweet. It is the thought of vengeance. Cadwallader first speaks of it.

"Whatever has happened to the poor girls, we must go after them, anyhow. And the scoundrels, we must find them."

"Find and punish them!" cries Crozier, clenching his fists, as if they were before him. "Ay! that we surely shall. If it cost all my money, I will revenge the wrongs of Carmen Montijo."

"And I those of Inez Alvarez."

For a while the two stand brooding upon that which has cast such black shadow over their hearts, as their lives. Cadwallader again speaks:

"It appears to me they must have plotted it all before leaving San Francisco, and that they shipped aboard the barque for the express purpose of getting the gold. That is Don Gregorio's idea of it."

"It seems probable enough; though it don't matter much how or when they planned the wicked deed. Enough that they've done it. But to think of Harry Blew turning traitor, and taking part with them. That is to me the strangest thing of all. Strange as painful."

"But do you believe he has done so?"

"How can I help believing it? What we've been told leaves no alternative. Don Gregorio heard him get into the boat along with the rest; besides saying something which proves that he went willingly. Alas! it must be so. Only to think of such black ingratitude. By Heavens, Cadwallader! I'd as soon have thought of suspecting yourself."

"His conduct is certainly strange, and seems incredible. I believed Blew to be a thoroughly honest fellow. But I suppose the gold corrupted him, as it has many a better man. Let us think no more about him. Only hope that we may some day lay hands on him."

"Ah! if I ever do that! With my arms around him, I once saved his worthless life. Let me but get him into my embrace again and he'll have a hug to squeeze the last breath out of his body."

"The chance may come yet to chastise the whole crew. What precious brutes they must have been. According to Don Gregorio's account, of all nations, the worst sort of luck. The old negro says the same. Among them four that spoke Spanish, and appeared to be Spaniards, or Spanish-Americans. Suppose we pay a visit to the fore-castle and see if we can find any record of their names. It might be of use hereafter."

"Let us go!" assents the lieutenant, and the two start forward.

They go in silence, with gloom upon their faces. There is that in their hearts which grieves it; and that neither has yet made known to the other.

A black, bitter thought; blacker and more bitter than the knowledge of Harry Blew's heartless treason.

Unspoken they carry it into the fore-castle; but they are not many minutes there before finding what discloses it without either uttering a word. A bunk—the most conspicuous of the two tiers—is explored first. Among its scattered contents are papers of various sorts, some letters, several numbers of an old "Diario," and a pack of Spanish cards. Beside them is a card of a different kind—a little parallelogram of white, with a name printed upon it. A visiting card of course, but whose? As he picks it up and reads the name, Crozier's blood curdles, the hair crisping on his head:

"MR. EDWARD CROZIER; U. S. F. Crusader."

He does not need to be told how it came there. Instinctively he knows, in a moment remembers, when, where and to whom it was given. He identifies it as that exchanged with De Lara on the day of their encounter.

Thrusting it into his pocket, he clutches at the letters, and looks at their superscription. "DON FRANCISCO DE LARA."

Opening, he rapidly reads them, one after the other. His hands holding them shake as if with a palsy, while in his eyes there is an expression of the keenest anxiety. He fears that subscribed to some he will find a name dear to him—the name of Carmen Montijo. If so, farewell to all faith in humankind. Harry Blew's ingratitude has destroyed his belief in man. A letter from the daughter of Don Gregorio Montijo to the gambler, Frank Lara, will kill his confidence in women.

With eager eyes, and lips compressed, he continues to peruse the letters. They are from many correspondents, and relate to various matters, most of them about money and *monte*, signed Faustina Calderon. Such as might be expected to form the correspondence of a professional "sport." In all the lot there is neither letter nor note signed Carmen Montijo.

As the last passes through his fingers, he breathes freely, but not without some self-reproach for having doubted the woman who was to have been his wife. Nor searching further through the forsaken effects, is there any souvenir of the lady bearing this name.

Without that there is enough in the discovery first made. Crozier's voice sounds husky as he turns to Cadwallader, aware of all, saying:

"Now we know!"

CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE LOST LOG BOOK.

No common pirates, then; no mere crew of mutinous sailors, have carried off Carmen Montijo, and Inez Alvarez. It has been done by Francisco De Lara, and Faustino Calderon. For though they discover no evidence of the latter having been aboard the barque, it is deducible, leaving no doubt. With a scheme like that in prospect, such conspirators were not likely to part.

Now cognizant of the whole plan, with its particulars, the young officers stand gazing in one another's faces, both showing an expression of the most piteous wretchedness. The new discovery has increased it. It was painful to think of their sweet hearts being the sport of robbers. But they would rather than know them in the power of De Lara and Calderon. From what they remember of these two men, the poor girls are doomed to ruffian treatment—to ruin.

"Yes; it is all clear," says Crozier, after a pause. "No gold-getting has brought about this. That may have influenced the others who shipped as their confederates, but with them the scheme has been more comprehensive, a motive different as devilish. I see it all now."

"Do you know, Ned, I half suspected it from the first. You remember what I said as we were leaving San Francisco. After what happened between us and the two scoundrels, I had my fears about our dear girls being left in the same place with them. Still, who'd have ever thought of their following them aboard ship? Above all with Blew there, and after his promise to protect them. I remember his saying he'd lay down his life to shield them."

"He swore it—to me he swore it. It's hard to believe he has broken his oath. But from what Don Gregorio says he must have done it, and leagued with the other eleven. It appears there was that number, besides Blew. Of the four who spoke Spanish, two no doubt were De Lara and Calderon, the others their confederates who lay in wait for us that night. Oh! that they had succeeded in their intent. I could wish they had killed me!"

"Dear Ned, don't talk so despairingly. I admit things have a black look, but they may brighten. I have got a sort of belief they will. What do you propose doing after we get to Panama? If we find the frigate there, we'll be obliged to join her."

"Obliged! There's no obligation for a man reckless as I—as this misery makes me. Unless Captain Bracebridge consents to assist us in the search we contemplate, I shall go alone."

"No, Crozier, not alone; there's one that'll be with you."

"Of course, Will. I know I can count on you. What I mean is if Bracebridge won't help us with the frigate, I'll charter a vessel myself, engage a crew, and search every foot of the American coast, till I find where they've put ashore. I tell you, Cad, I love Carmen Montijo better than my life. And when a man feels that way he may do much. I have money at my command—a large fortune—and I shall spend it all to punish these pirates. If it must be, I shall leave the service. My commission may go to the deuce."

"And mine. I'm with you in any way. What a pity we can't tell the place where they put in. They must have been near land to take an open boat?"

"In sight of—close to it. I've questioned Don Gregorio. He knows that much, and but little more. The poor gentleman is almost as badly beside himself as the skipper. A wonder he's not insane, too. He says they had sighted land that morning; the first since leaving California. The captain told them they would reach Panama in about two days after. As the boat was being rowed away he saw her through the stern windows. She appeared to make for some land not far off, lit up by a clear moonlight. That's all I can get out of him."

"The old negro can tell no better story?"

"I've questioned him, too. He's equally sure of their having been close in to the coast; but what part he has no idea, any more than the ourangs. However, he states a particular fact, which is more satisfactory. A short while before they laid hold of him he was looking over the side, and saw a strangely shaped hill or mountain. He describes it as having two tops. The moon was between them, and that was why he took notice of it. That's the sum and substance of his topographical knowledge. Limited though it be, I like it the best. That double-headed hill may some day stand us in stead."

"If the skipper had kept his senses, he could have told us all about it. He must have known where he was when the barque was abandoned. His going crazy at this time is enough to make one think the very Fates were against us. But I say, Ned, we've never thought of looking at the log-book! It ought to throw some light on the thing."

"It ought, and doubtless would, if we only had it. You're mistaken in saying we've never thought of it; I have; and been looking for it all the time you were taking your nap. It's gone; and Heaven knows what's become of it. They may have thrown it overboard before leaving; though what good that would do them I can't see. The cook says it used to lie on a little shelf in the companion-way. The captain always kept it there. I've looked there and everywhere else, but no log-book. As you say, it's enough to make us believe the Fates are against us. If so, we shall never live to reach Panama, much less live to—"

"Look!" exclaims Cadwallader, interrupting the lugubrious speech of his comrade. "See those brutes! What's that they're knocking about? By Jove, I believe it's the log-book!"

These brutes are the Myas monkeys, that, away in the waist, are tossing something between them; certainly a large book bound in rough leather. They have mutilated the binding, and with teeth and claws are tearing out the leaves, as each tries to take it from the other.

"It is—it must be!" responds Crozier; and both officers rush off to rescue it.

They succeed; but not without difficulty, and a free handling of handspikes, almost braining the apes before they relinquish it.

The book is at length recovered, though in a very ruinous condition; but, fortunately, with all the written leaves untorn.

Turning to the last of these there is found an entry, evidently the last made: "LAT. 7° 20' N; LONG. 85° 12' W. LIGHT BREEZE."

"Good!" exclaims Crozier, rushing back to the quarter-deck, and bending over the chart; "with this and the double-headed hill, we may yet get upon track of the despoiler. Cad, old boy! there's something in this. I have a presentiment that things are taking a turn, and the Fates will yet be for us."

"God grant they may!"

"Ah!" sighs Crozier, "if we had but ten men

aboard the barque, or even six, I'd never think of going on to Panama, but sail straight for the island of Coiba. For the chart shows that the land they sighted must have been either that or Nicaron, that lies on its sou'-west side. With a 'light breeze' they could not have made much way afterward, and, running for Panama, the high land seen at night should be Punta Marieta. They've put in somewhere along the coast of Veragua; and there we'll come upon their traces. Great God! What wouldn't I give for ten true fellows! A thousand pounds apiece! I only wish the cutter's crew had been left along with us."

"Never fear, Ned! we'll get them again, or as good. Old Bracebridge won't fail us, I'm sure. He's a dear, good-hearted soul; and when he hears the tale we've to tell, it'll be all right. If he can't come along with the frigate, he'll allow us enough men to man the barque—and enough to make short work with the pirate crew, if we can once get face to face with them. I only wish we were in Panama."

"I'd rather we were off Coiba, or on shore beside the ruffians."

"Not as we are now, three against twelve; for though there's six of us, three can't be counted."

"I don't care for that; I'd give ten thousand dollars to be in their midst—even alone."

"You'll never be there alone. Where you go I go. We have a common cause, and shall stand or fall together."

"That we shall. God bless you, Cadwallader! I feel you're worthy of the friendship I've placed in you. Now, let's talk no more about it, but bend on all the sail we can, run on to Panama, and after that we'll steer for the island of Coiba."

CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE ANSWERED CALL.

THREE days have elapsed and the Condor is still standing on an easterly course. Several of her torn sails have been patched, or replaced by others, so as to hold wind; and she now makes way at the rate of seven knots an hour.

Grunnet is at the wheel, though not always there. The two young officers have been steering turn and turn with him; and the old negro having recovered strength, is able to take a "trick," too.

Don Gregorio is also convalescing, and occasionally comes on deck.

Alas! for poor Lautanas; he is still beside himself, but tenderly cared for by the others.

Ever since the night of that terrible storm they have been favored by fair winds and a calm sea, such as gives its name to the Pacific.

And now, on the morning of the fourth day, a fresh breeze bears them on in the course they desire to run. They are heading straight for the Bay of Panama, with the hope of soon entering it.

The two young officers are by the capstan, having the chart spread upon its head, the lieutenant looking at it.

After consulting it a while, he turns to the mid-shipman, saying:

"We're lucky in having this wind. If it keeps in the same quarter for another twenty-four hours, we ought to sight land. And if this map may be depended on, it should be the promontory north side Panama Bay. I hope the chart's correct. 'Punta Malo,' as its name imports, is likely not a very nice place to make mistakes about. If we should run too close to it with this west wind—"

"Steamer to nor'ard!" cries a rough voice, interrupting him.

It is Grunnet who gives the information.

The young officers, turning with a start, see the same. Crozier, laying hold of a telescope, raises it to his eye, while he holds it there, saying:

"You're right, coxswain; it is a steamer, and standing this way. She'll run across our bows. Up helm, and set the barque's head straight for her. That's our best way."

Grunnet obeys the order, and by the necessary number of turns of the wheel, brings the Condor's head in position till she heads to meet the steamer. The two officers, with the negro assisting, board tacks and sheets and trim sails for the changed course.

Soon the two vessels steer in opposite directions, and lessen the distance between. And as they mutually make approach, each speculates on the character of the other. They on board the barque have little difficulty in deciding upon that of the steamer. At a glance they have seen she is not a war-ship, but a passenger packet; and as there are no others in that part of the Pacific Ocean, she can only be one of the "liners," lately established between San Francisco and Panama.

They are sure of this, and equally certain she is coming down from the former port, her destination the latter.

Not so easy for those aboard the steamship to make out the character of the craft, that has turned up in their track, standing straight toward them. They see a barque, polacca-masted, with some sails set, and others hanging in shreds from her yards. This of itself would be enough to excite curiosity; but there is something besides, a flag reversed flying at her masthead—the ensign of Chili.

Mattering not what its nationality; enough that they know it to be a signal of distress appealing to their sympathy.

Responding to the appeal, the commander of the steamship, on coming near, orders her engines to reverse action, till the huge leviathan, late coming at the rate of twelve knots to the hour, gradually lessens speed, and at length lies motionless upon the surface of the sea.

Simultaneously the barque being "hove to," her sails cease propelling her, and she also drifts, less than a cable's length between the two.

From the steamer the hail comes:

"Barque ahoy. What barque is that?"

"The Condor—Valparaiso—in distress!"

"Send a boat aboard!"

"Not strength enough to man it."

"Wait, then; we'll tow you."

In less than five minutes' time one of the quarter-boats of the liner is lowered down, and a crew leaps into it. Pulling off from her side, it soon touches that of the vessel in distress; but not for its crew to board her; Crozier has already traced out his course of action. Slipping down into the steamer's boat, he requests her crew to row him to their ship, which

they do without questioning. The uniform which he wears entitles him to respect—to command.

Stepping on board the steamship, he sees that she is what he has taken her for: a packet from San Francisco, en route to Panama. She is crowded with passengers—at least a thousand standing upon her decks; they of all qualities and kinds, all colors and nationalities. Most of them California gold-diggers returning to their homes, some successful, and consequently cheerful, others downcast and disappointed.

He is not long in telling his tale; first to the commander of the steamship, along with his officers; then to the passengers. For to them he makes appeal, not alone to assist in navigating the barque, but to go with him in pursuit of the pirate crew that abandoned her.

He makes known his position, and power to reward; both indorsed by the commander of the steamship, who by chance can answer for his credentials.

They are not needed; nor yet the promise of a money reward. Among the stalwart men who return from California, even the raggedest, are many who are heroes, true Paladins, despite their common attire. And amidst their rags, pistols and knives ready to be drawn for the right.

After hearing the young officer's tale, coupled with the appeal he makes, twenty men spring forward in response to it; not for the reward offered, but as volunteers in the cause of humanity and justice. He could select twice, or thrice the number. But deeming twenty enough, with these he returns to the Condor. The two vessels then part company, the steamship continuing on for Panama; while the barque, now better manned, and with more sail set, is steered for the point where the line of lat. 7° 20' N. intersects that of long. 82° 12' W.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

HORRID CRAVINGS.

THE pirates are still upon the isle, where by misadventure they made landing.

Far different their appearance from that when they stepped ashore with their plunder and captives.

In truth, they were scarce recognizable as the same men. Then in full strength of body, and swaggering confidence of spirit, their tongues given to loud talk; now they look like skeletons, stalking about silently and with subdued mien. Some do not stalk at all, but sit languidly on points of projecting rock, or lie stretch along the earth; not for resting or pleasure, but from sheer inability to stand erect.

Famine has made its imprint on their faces; hunger and thirst long endured, and still torturing them. The dread insignia of starvation can be read in sunken eyes and traced on their hollow cheeks.

Not strange that it can. For ten days they have tasted no food save shell-fish, and the rank flesh of predatory birds, both in scant supply. And no drink excepting some rain-drops caught in the boat-sail spread for the purpose, or wrung from their shirts.

For ten days they have kept vigil, without seeing sign of human life save their own. A tarpaulin-rigged oar and boat-hook, placed upon the highest point of the isle, has failed to catch the eye of anyone on the main shore. Or if seen, the signal has been disregarded. And no vessel has passed coast-wise within sight.

Explored on every point, the sterile rock offered nothing fit for the construction of a raft—not a stalk bigger than a bean-pole.

The first fears have been realized. They seem as far from all chance of being rescued, as if cast away on a coral reef in the middle of the ocean.

Repentant are the pirates now, doleful as they dwell on their future. Willingly would they recall the past, and if they could, undo their wicked deeds. Gladly would they restore the gold—too glad, could they but think that he from whom they took it still lived.

Alas! it cannot be. Their victims left aboard the barque must have long since ceased to breathe. In the sea's bed they are now sleeping their last sleep, released from all earthly cares; and they who have so unceremoniously sent them to their rest may now almost envy them. Many of them do. In their hour of agony, as the demon of hunger gnaws at their vitals, and thirst within their throats scorches like a consuming fire, they care little for life, some rather desiring death.

Boastful or obedient, all are alike humbled now. Even Gomez no longer affects to be their leader, and the savage brute Padillo is tamed if not softened to true gentleness.

By a sort of tacit consent, Harry Blew has come to be the controlling spirit—perhaps from having evinced more humanity than the rest. For now that adversity is on them, their better natures are brought out, and the least hardened among them have returned to the tenderness of childhood.

The change has been of singular consequence to their captives. These are no longer restrained, but set free to go and come when they please. No longer need they fear injury. Even insult is not offered. No rudeness either in speech or feature. On the contrary they are treated with studied respect, almost with deference. Harry Blew, apparently the first to feel this sentiment toward them, has directed it until all the others seem alike inspired with it.

The best of the food—bad at best—has been apportioned to them, as also the largest share of the caught rain-water. Enough of both to sustain strength; and they have in turn become as administering angels—tender nurses to the very men who have made misery of their lives.

Thus has it been for days; till the night of the ninth; when a heavy rain-fall, filling the boat's sail, has enabled them to replenish the beaker, with all the other vessels brought ashore.

On the morning of the tenth day some change is observable in the conduct of the starving crew. No longer athirst, the kindred appetite has become keener, absorbing every thought—every instinct of their souls. It looks wolf-like out of eyes sunken in their sockets, and is seen in their glances as they regard one another. In the eyes of some there is an expression more than fiendish; for it is the cold, calculating gaze of cannibalism.

It has come to this, though no one has spoken of it. It is as yet only in their thoughts. But as hour after hour passes, it is taking tangible shape, and

threatens soon to become the subject of speech—perhaps action.

One or two show it most; Padillo most of all. In his glance the unnatural craving is plainly recognizable—plain as his eyes follow the fair forms moving gently in their midst. There can be no mistaking his look. It is the stare of the anthropophagist!

CHAPTER LXXIX.

A SAIL!

THERE has been a long interregnum of silence, no one having spoken on any subject, most knowing that the minds of all are upon this. Padillo deeming the time has arrived, breaks the silence by broaching it.

"Amigos!" he says, an odd appellation considering the proposal he was about to make, "since there's no food to be found, it's clear we've to die of starvation; though if we could only hold out a little longer, something might turn up to save us. For myself, I don't yet despair but that some coasting-craft may come along; or they may see us from the shore. It's only a question of time and keeping alive. How are we to do that?"

"Ay—how?" asks Velarde, as if secretly prompted to put the question.

"Well," answers Padillo, "there's a way, and only one that I can think of; there's no need for all of us to die—not yet. Some one ought, and must, so that the others may have a chance to be saved. Are you agreed to that?"

The interrogatory does not need to be more explicitly put; it is understood by all, and several give assent, either tacitly or in brief monosyllabic speech. A few make no sign one way or the other. They are too feeble and far gone to care what may become of them.

"What would you propose, Padillo?"

It is again Velarde who interrogates.

Padillo makes reply, first turning his eyes toward the grotto in which the girls have taken refuge from the hot rays of the meridian sun.

"Comarados! I don't see why we men should suffer death by starvation, while women—"

Harry Blew does not permit him to finish the speech. Catching its significance, he cries:

"Avast, there!—not another word o' that. If any o' us has got to die, and be eaten, it must be a man. As for the weemen, they go last, not first. At all events, they don't go before me. I'll die before they do, and so will somebody else."

Striker and Davis indorse the determination; Hernandez feebly, but Gomez in protestation strong as that of Blew himself.

In De Lara there still lives a sentiment which makes the proposal of Padillo seem something more than horrible. It is the first time he and Harry Blew are in accord, and being so, there is no uncertainty about the decision to be arrived at. It is at once tacitly understood, and only waits for one to declare it.

Striker does this, saying:

"Though I hev been a convick, and don't deny it, I ain't a coward, nor no way afeerd to kick up my heels whensomever my time comes. If that bes now, and Jack Striker's got to die, dash it, he's ready; but it must be a fair and square thing. Therefore, let it be settled by our castin' lots all round."

"I agree to that," growls Padillo, "if you mean to include the women as well."

"We don't mean anything of the sort," says Blew, springing to his feet. "Ye unmanly scoundrel!" he continues, approaching Padillo, "repeat your dastardly proposal, and there'll be no need for drawin' cuts. In a minute more, eyther you or me 'll make food for anybody as likes to eat us. Now!"

The Californian, who has still preserved much of his tenacious strength, and all his ruffian ferocity, nevertheless shrinks and cowers before the stalwart sailor.

"Carajo!" he exclaims, doggedly and reluctantly submitting. "Be it as you like. I don't care any more than the rest of you when it comes to facing Fate. Rafael Rocas isn't the man to show the white feather. I only propose what I believe to be fair. In a matter of life and death, I don't see why women are any better than men; but if you all think different, then do as you say, and let us cast the lots leaving them out."

Padillo's submissive speech puts an end to the strange debate. The side issue is decided against him, and the main question again comes up.

After a time it, too, is determined. Hunger demands a victim. To appease it one must die. The horrid resolve reached, it remains to fix on the mode of selection. No great difficulty is there in this. It is got over by Striker saying:

"Chums! there's just twelve o' us, the even dozen. Let's take twelve o' these little shells ye see scattered about, and put 'em into the ship's pannikin; one o' them we can mark. Him as draws the marked one, must do—I needn't tell you what."

"Die" would have been the word, as all understood without having it spoken.

The plan is acceptable, and accepted. There seems no fairer for obtaining the fiat of Fate on the dread question. The shells lie thickly strewn over the ground. There are thousands, all of the same shape and size. By touch or feel it would be impossible to tell one from another; nor yet by color, since all are snow-white. Twelve of them are taken up and put into the tin cup, a quart measure—one being first marked by a spot of red. It is blood drawn from Striker's own arm, which he has punctured for the purpose. Soon absorbed by the porous substance of the shell, it cannot possibly be detected by the touch. The preliminaries completed, all gather round, ready to draw. They but wait for him who keeps watch by the spread tarpaulin. He must take his chance with the rest in this lottery of life or death. It is the Dutchman who is on duty above. They have already hailed him, and commanded him to come down, proclaiming their purpose. He neither obeys nor gives back response. He does not look in their direction! They can see him by the signal-staff standing erect with his face turned toward the sea. He has a hand raised shading his eyes from the sun. He appears to be regarding some object in the offing.

Presently he lowers the spread palm, then raises a telescope that sparkles in the sun.

They stand speechless with bated breaths, their dark purpose for the time suspended, for on the

gleaming of that glass they have a fancy there may be hope as there is light.

There is silence till the telescope goes down. Then a shout that sends the blood in quick current through their veins, bringing back hope to their hearts.

"A sail!"

CHAPTER LXXX.

CAN IT BE THE CONDOR?

"A SAIL!"

Two little words, but to men situated as they, full of big meaning—oft carrying the question of life or death.

To their ears sweet as music, despite the Teutonic sibilant of him who gave them utterance. Down drops the pannikin, spilling and scattering the shells. There is hope they may no more need them.

At the shout all have faced toward the sea, and stand scanning its surface. But with gaze unrewarded. The white flecks gleaming afar, are but the wings of gulls.

"Where away?" shouts one, interrogating him on the hill.

"Sou'-westert."

South-westward they can not see. In this direction their view is cut off by the precipice, interposed between them and the outside shore. All that are able start to ascend the cliff. The stronger ones rush up the gorge, as if their lives depended on speed. The weaker ones go toiling after. One or two, weaker still, stay waiting below.

The first up on clearing the scarp get their eyes upon the Dutchman. His behavior might cause them surprise if they could not account for it. The beacon is upon the summit of a hill two hundred yards beyond. He is beside it, and apparently beside himself. Dancing over the ground, tossing his arms about, and waving his hat overhead. All the while he shouts as to some ship close at hand, hailing, "Ahoy! ahoy!"

Looking they can see none, and for a moment think him mad, and fear it may be all a mistake. For there is no ship near enough to be hailed.

But sending their gaze further out their fear gives place to joy; for certainly there is a ship—a mere speck on the horizon. But seeming big through the telescope, the sight has frenzied the sailor, till he fancies those aboard may hear his hail, or see his gesticulations.

Foolish, as the others can perceive; but without staying to reflect, they strain on toward the summit where the signal has been erected.

Harry Blew is the first to reach it, and clutching the telescope, drags it from the hands of the half-crazed Dutchman.

Bringing it to his eye he bends it on the distant sail, and there keeps it more than a minute. Meanwhile, the others have come up; and clustering around, impatiently question him.

"What is she? How's she standing?"

"A bit of a barque," responds Blew. "And from what I can make out, coming along the coast. I'll be better able to tell you when she draws out from the clump o' cloud."

Gomez, standing by, appears eager to get hold of the glass, while Blew seems equally reluctant to give it up. Still holding it to his eye he says:

"See to that signal, mates! Spread the tarpaulin to its full stretch, and face it square, so's to g'e 'em the best chance o' sightin' it."

Striker and Davis spring to the piece of tarred canvas, and one at each corner draw out creases and hold it as directed.

All the while Blew stands with the telescope to his eye, loth to relinquish it.

But Gomez, grown importunate, insists on having his turn, and it is at length surrendered to him.

Blew, slipping aside, seems excited with some emotion he tries to conceal. Strong it must be, judging from its effects. His face shows an expression difficult to describe, surprise that amounts to amazement, joy mingled with fear, or more like anxiety.

Soon as yielding to Gomez the glass, he pulls off his pilot-coat; then divesting himself of his shirt—a scarlet flannel—he suspends it from the outer end of the cross-piece supporting the tarpaulin. As he does so, saying to Striker and Davis:

"That's a signal no ship ought to disregard, an' won't if manned by Christian men. She won't if she sees it. You stay here an' keep the things well spread. I'm goin' below to say a word to the poor creeturs; stand by the signal and don't let 'em haul it down."

"Ay, ay!" answers Striker, without comprehending, and somewhat wondering at the direction—under the circumstances strange. "All right, Blew. Ye may depend on me an' Bill."

"I know it—I do," rejoins the ex-man-o-war's-man, again drawing the dreadnaught over his shirtless skin. "Both of you be true to me, an' before long I may be able to do something to show that I ain't ungrateful."

Saying this he separates from the "Sydney ducks," going down toward the gorge.

Both as they stand by the signal staff wonder at his words, and interrogate one another as to what may be their meaning.

In the midst of their mutual questioning they are attracted by a cry strangely intoned. It is from Gomez, who has brought down the telescope, and holds it in trembling hand.

"What is it?" asks Padillo, stepping up beside him.

"Take the glass, see for yourself."

The contraband does as directed.

He is silent for some seconds while leveling the telescope on the strange vessel. Soon as he has her within the field of view, he commences making remarks, overheard by Striker and Davis, giving both a surprise—the latter least.

"Barque she is—polacca masts. Currambo! that's queer, about the same bulk too. If it wasn't that we're sure of the other being below, I'd be willing to swear it was she; of course it can only be a coincidence. Santissima! a strange one!"

Velarde in turn takes the telescope, he too after a sight through it, expressing himself in a similar manner. Hernandez next; for the four Spaniards have all ascended to the hill.

But Striker does not wait to hear what Hernandez may have to say. Dropping the tarpaulin he strides

up to him, and *sans ceremonie*, jerks the telescope from his fingers.

Then bringing it up to his eye sights for himself. Less than twenty seconds suffice for him to determine the character of the vessel. Within that time his glance settling upon her hull, traversing along the line of her bulwarks, and then descending to the top of her masts, recognizes them all, as things with which he is well acquainted.

He too almost lets fall the telescope, and turning to the others, he says, in scared voice:

"It's the Condor!"

CHAPTER LXXXI. THE AVENGING NEMESIS.

"The Condor?"

"*Cospita!* it can not be."

"*Mil demonios*, no!"

"*Carajo!*"

Thus the four Spaniards respond to Striker's announcement.

"But it be her, for all that. It's the Chilean barque to a surety. Her or the ghost o' her."

The speech intensifies strange thoughts already in their minds. How could it be the Condor? Ten days ago scuttled, sent to the bottom of the sea. She could not have again come to the surface! She can not be sailing there. Impossible! The thing seen must be a specter!

In their weak state, with nerves unnaturally excited, they almost believe this. At least enough to impress one and all with a wild, weird fancy, striking terror to their guilty souls.

What can they think? What other could they, than that something not mortal is pursuing them? The Hand of God is against them. They know it by experience of the past ten days. And now in the strange vessel, standing along the coast, whether specter or not, they can see that Hand stretching further and coming nearer and nearer.

Clearly it is Fate—surely the avenging Nemesis! "The barque, without a doubt," continues Striker, with the glass again to his eye. "Everything the same 'ceptin' the sails, some of which show patched-like. That be nothin'. It's the Chile craft an' no other. You see the ensign wi' the one star trailing over her taffrail. The Condor, sure's we stan' here!"

"*Carra!*" exclaims Gomez. "Where are they who took charge of the scuttling? Did they do it?"

Remembering them, they all turn round, looking for them among the group gathered around the staff; they are not seen. Blew has long ago gone down the gorge, and Davis is just disappearing into it. They shout to him to come back. He hears, but not heeding them, continues on, and is soon out of sight. It matters not much questioning him, and they give up thought of it. The sail out at sea engrosses their attention, again recalled to it.

Now nearer, the telescope is no longer needed to tell that it is polacca-masted; with all other points proclaiming it the Condor. Size, shape of hull, sit in the water, everything the same, and the bit of bunting at the peak a Chilean ensign. Yes, it is the Condor's flag.

They remember a damaged point on the star. It is there. Beyond doubt the barque, the abandoned!

Standing toward them, straight toward them—coming on at a rate of speed that has already brought her abreast the islet in a time almost incredible. She has all sail set, with a strong breeze abeam. She has seen their signal—no doubt of that. If there were, it is soon set at rest. For, as they stand watching her, she comes opposite the opening in the reef; then up goes her mainsail, her after-yards are squared, and she is instantly hove to.

Down goes a boat from the davits; as it strikes the water, men swarming over the side and dropping into her. Then the plash of oars, their wet blades glinting in the sun.

It is rowed through the reef passage, impelled by strong arms, soon crosses the stretch of calm water, and shoots up into the cove.

Beaching, its crew springs out upon the pebbly strand—some not waiting till it is drawn up, but dashing breast-deep into the water. There are nearly twenty, all stalwart men, with big beards, some in sailor garb, but some red-shirted, belted, bristling with bowie-knives and pistols. Tall boots, the tops below the knees, with trowsers tucked in. In short, the costume of the California gold-digger.

Two are different from the rest—in the uniform of naval officers, with caps gold-banded. These, though the youngest, seem to command the others—to lead them, too; being the first to leap out of the boat. And soon as on shore, drawing swords and advancing at their head.

All this observed by those on the hill standing by the staff, as if, like it, fixed. But not as motionless, for all are trembling—with stark terror.

Hitherto partaking of the supernatural, it is not less strange now. At least, not that of Gomez and Hernandez—Francisco De Lara and Faustino Calderon. Strange to see the Condor afloat—stranger still, far more unaccountable, to behold among the men who have come out of her two well known to them, and as heartily hated. For in the officers leading the diggers they recognize their old rivals, Crozier and Cadwallader.

CHAPTER LXXXII. A CHANCE YET.

THE four Spaniards are alone upon the summit of the hill, Striker, Davis, and the others having gone down the cliff. They stand close to the tarpaulin signal, still spread. Face to face in quartette, as if about to commence a quadrille, but with an expression very different from that of dancers. Instead of delight, their countenances show the extreme of wretched desperation. Vividly they recall their crime, now that its punishment seems near. Can aught avail them to avert it? No, they think neither of escape nor resistance. Both would be idle, the last only hastening the dread end—death.

One of the four—it is De Lara—in sullen silence, and with eyes dilated. He has watched the beaching of the boat, and the debarking of its crew. Recognizing the officers, he clutches Calderon by the arm, exclaiming:

"Great God! Faustino! See *guardia marinas!*"

"*Por Cristo!* Yes," was the rejoinder; "mystery of mysteries, what can it mean?"

To this De Lara makes no reply till some time after. Then, thus:

"No mystery: none whatever. I see it all now, clear as daylight. Blew has been traitor to us, as I suspected all along. He and Davis have not scuttled the barque, but left her to go drifting about. The frigate to which the officers belong has come across, picked her up, and lo! there they are!"

"*Caval!*" exclaims Calderon. "It is as you say, no doubt. But these rough fellows. They're not man-o'-war s-men, nor sailors of any sort. They appear to be gold-diggers, the same as we saw in San Francisco. Where can they be from?"

"Impossible to say. It matters not what they are, or where from. Enough that they're here, and we in their power."

"*Mil demonios!* What do you suppose they'll do to us? Do you think they'll shoot or hang us?"

"What an idle question. I don't think any thing about it. One or the other they'll be sure to do."

"*Santisima!* there's no chance of our escaping?"

"None whatever. No use our trying to get away from them. There's nowhere we could conceal ourselves; not a spot to give us shelter for a single hour. For my part, I don't intend to stir from here. Yes; I shall go down to them and meet death like a man. No, like a tiger. Before dying I shall kill. Say, are you good to do the same? Are you game for it?"

The interrogatory is to Calderon alone. The other two have stepped to the cliff edge, and are looking below, seemingly engaged in an earnest dialogue.

"I don't comprehend you," answers Calderon.

"Kill what, or who?"

"Whomsoever I can. Two for certain."

"Which two?"

"Crozier and Carmen. You may do as you please. I've marked out my pair, and mean to have their lives before surrendering my own. Hers, if I can't hit. She shan't stay behind to triumph over my fall. No, by the Almighty!"

While speaking, the desperado has taken out his revolver, holding it at half-cock, spins the cylinder round to see that all six chambers are loaded.

Sure of this, he returns it to his holster, and glances at the *machete* on his left side.

All this with a cool carefulness that shows he intends to carry through his hellish purpose.

Calderon, quailing at the thought of it, endeavors to dissuade him. He believes there is still a chance to escape death, and that their punishment will be only imprisonment.

He is urging this on De Lara, when the latter cuts him short.

"You can rot in a prison, if it so please you. After what's happened, that's not the destiny for me. I prefer death and vengeance."

"Better life and vengeance," cries Rocas, coming up, Lozada along with him, both seemingly in anxious haste.

"Quick, comrades!" he continues, "follow me. I'll find a way to save the first, and maybe get the last, sooner than you expected."

"It's no use, Rafael, our attempting to run away. They'll only shoot us down all the more certain. Where could we run to?"

"Come on! I'll show you where. *Carajo!* Don't stand hesitating. Every second counts now. If we can but get there in time."

"Get where?"

"*Al bote.*"

At the words, De Lara utters an exclamation of joy. They apprise him of a scheme which, if successful, will not only save his life, but give him a revenge sweet as ever fell to the lot of mortal man.

He hesitates no longer, but hastens after the seal-hunter, who, with Calderon and Lozada, has already started toward the cliff.

Soon they are descending it, not by the gorge through which they came up, but another that leads down to a different cove.

Little dream Crozier and Cadwallader, or the men who have landed along with them, of the danger impending. If the scheme of the seal-hunter succeed, theirs will be a fearful fate. The tables will be turned upon them!

CHAPTER LXXXIII. THE ARRESTED STROKE.

LEAVING their boat behind with the coxswain to take care of it, the rescuers advance toward the inner end of the cove.

At first with caution; till passing the rock portal, they see what is before them. Then the young officers rush forward, with no fear of having to fight. No longer a thought of it. Instead of armed men to meet them, they behold dear ones from whom they have been so long separated—their betrothed sweethearts. Beside them Harry Blew!

With swords sheathed, and pistols returned to their holsters, they hasten on, the girls advancing to meet them.

Soon they come together, two and two, breasts touching, and arms enfolded in mutual embrace.

For a while no words; the hearts of all four too full for speech. Only ejaculations of joy, kisses, tears. Then questions, explanations, both necessarily brief and abrupt. The first from Crozier, telling Carmen her father still lives; that he is aboard the barque, forbidden by them to take part in their expedition ashore, till they can report to him the result. He lives—he is well—that is enough. Then a word or two epitomizing past occurrences, succeeded by interrogatories from Crozier about the present—the situation as it is.

For answers to them he turns to Harry Blew; all the while standing by in silent expectation.

Neither by word nor gesture has the sailor yet saluted his patron and preserver. Is it from delicacy to intrude in that sacred hour, or the dread of the self-condemned criminal?

In quick retrospect of all that has passed, of all he has heard, Crozier concludes it to be the latter. How could he otherwise? Withal, he will wait the explanation; and, stepping up to the ex-man-o'-war's-man, he demands it in a stern voice, saying:

"Now, sir, I desire an account from you. Tell your story straight, and don't conceal or prevaricate. If your treason be as black as I believe it, you deserve no mercy from me. And your only chance to obtain it will be by telling the whole truth."

While speaking the officer has drawn his sword, and stands facing the sailor, as if a word might be the signal for thrusting him through.

Blew is himself armed with both pistol and knife. But instead of showing sign to draw either, or making any defense, he stands cowed-like, his head drooping down on his breast.

No response. Only his broad chest heaving and falling, as if stirred by some terrible emotion.

His silence seems a confession of guilt.

Taking, or mistaking, it for such, Crozier cries out:

"Traitor! confess, before I cut you down, or run this blade through your body."

"You may kill me if you wish, Master Edward. By rights, my life belongs to ye. But if ye take it now, I'll have the satisfaction o' knowin' I've done the best I could to prove my gratitude for your once savin' it."

Long before the end of this speech the threatening stroke is stayed, the raised blade dropped, point downward. On the hand grasping it a gentle one is laid, a soft voice, saying:

"Stay, Edward! *Dios de mi alma!* What would you do? You know not. Listen! this brave man; to him we owe our lives—everything."

"Yes," adds Inez, advancing; "it is he who has protected us."

Crozier stands trembling, the sword almost shaken from his grasp.

While sheathing it, the reflection crosses his mind how near he has been to doing a deed that would ever after have made him a miserable man.

He feels like one restrained from a parricidal act—almost from suicide.

CHAPTER LXXXIV. A DESPERADO'S END.

"HILLOA! Hilloa! Help! Help!"

The cries come up from the shore in the voice of Grunnet, the coxswain. Quick succeeding, Crozier hears his own name, with the "help, help" reiterated.

Deferring further explanation with Blew, he dashes down toward the beach; Cadwallader and the gold-diggers following; all save two, who stay to guard the robbers who have surrendered.

On clearing the rocky portal they see what is causing the coxswain to sing out. Nor do they wonder at his terrified accents. For the sight sends a scare to their own hearts, they, too, simultaneously uttering ejaculations of alarm.

Grunnet is in the boat, standing erect, with the boat-hook in his hands. He holds it above his head, still continuing to shout. Four men are making toward him, fast as their legs can carry them. They are coming around the cove along its right side, and have already reached within twenty yards of the boat.

There is no speculation as to who they are. Crozier and Cadwallader recognize two of them on sight—the quicker that they have not turned up unexpectedly. While the same two are not unknown to some of the gold-diggers, who have seen them in the saloon El Dorado.

The other two—but no matter. That is of slight importance now. The point is to prevent them from seizing the boat and making away with her—their intention, as all can see.

And seeing it, they are thrilled with a sense of danger—a cold, shivering fear. For now they remember they have left scarce any one on board the anchored vessel—only the negro, and another man, with Don Gregorio, an invalid, and Captain Lautanas insane.

Should the escaping pirates succeed in seizing the boat, and boarding the barque, then—an appalling prospect!

They do not dwell upon it, but bend all their energies to arrest the terrible catastrophe. On they go, bounding over bowlders, crushing through shells and pebbles, Crozier at their head. Still they are behind time, and the others must reach the boat before them.

Perceiving this, Crozier calls out, in loud voice:

"Shove off, Grunnet! Get her into deep water. Bear a hand."

The coxswain, who has been swinging the boat-hook with brandishes around his head, brings it instantly down, point among the pebbles, and, with a desperate effort, shoves the keel clear, sending the boat adrift. But, before he can recover to repeat the push, pistols are fired, and, simultaneous with the reports, he is seen going down doubled over the bow-thwart.

A cry of vengeance peals from the pursuing party; maddened, they rush on.

Oh, God! are they too late?

It would seem so.

Over the gunwale of the boat, no longer defended, the four pirates have sprung, each of them laying hold of an oar. Already have they dropped down upon the thwarts, shipped the oars, and dropped blades in the water, and they are yet beyond pistol range!

Oh, God! are they to get away—the guilty wretches?

Ha! Something stays them! God is not for them; the oar-blades rise and fall, but the boat moves not! Her keel is upon coral; her bilge resting upon its rough projections. Their weight pressing down holds her fast, and the oar-stroke is idle.

They had not calculated on this obstruction, which proves the turning point of their fate. No use leaping out now, and lightening the boat, to get her again afloat. Too late for that or any other scheme for escape. There remains only the alternative of resistance, which means death, or surrender, that may seem to promise the same. De Lara would resist, and die; so, also, Rocas. But the other two are against it, instinctively clinging to whatever chance of life may be left them.

The coward, Calderon, cut short the uncertainty by rising erect, stretching forth his arms in a piteous appeal for mercy.

In an instant after they are surrounded, the boat grasped by the gunwale, and dragged back to the shore; the indignant rescuers with difficulty being restrained from shooting and treading them down upon the thwarts.

They would do this were Grunnet dead. Fortunately, they find him alive, and little hurt, a bullet having struck his skull, creasing and only stunning him. Assured of his safety, they pull the four pirates out of the boat, and after disarming, take them to the cave, for a time to be their prison.

Not for long. There is a Judge present before

whom trials are short, and sentences quickly followed by execution. It is the celebrated Justice Lynch.

Represented by a stalwart digger—all the others acting as jury—the trial is speedily brought to a termination. For the four Californians the verdict is guilty, the sentence death on the scaffold. The others, less criminal, to be carried on to Panama, and there delivered over to the Chilean consul, their crime being the robbing of the Chilean barque.

An exception is made in the case of Striker and Davis. The Sydney Ducks receive conditional pardon, on promise of better behavior throughout all future time. This they obtain by the intercession of Harry Blew, in accordance with the hint given on late leaving them beside the spread tarpaulin.

Of the four sentenced to be hanged, but three in this way suffer execution. The fourth meets his fate in a different manner, though with destiny the same. If not his own wish, by his own doing, De Lara dies first of the four. And not, as they, like a scared dog; but a fierce tiger, resisting to the last—to the end longing to destroy.

The recovered gold-dust is gathered together and put into the boat. The señoritas are cloaked, impatient to be taken back to the barque, yearning to embrace him they have been long fearing dead. The young officers stand beside them—all awaiting the last scene of the tragedy, which is to be the carrying out of the sentence decreed.

The stage is set for it; this the level spot of ground in front of the greater cave. A rope hangs down, with running noose at the end, its other end, in default of gallows-arm and the absence of trees, rigged over the point of a projecting rock.

De Lara is led out first—a digger on each side conducting him. He is not tied or confined in any way; but free, both hand and foot. They have no fear of his making escape. He could not. And knowing this, he has no thought of attempting it.

But a thought of something else—of his resolve mentally made and confessed to Calderon—to kill. The fiendish purpose comes back to him now, with what chance of executing it?

As he is conducted out of the cave, his eyes, glaring with lurid light, go searching everywhere, till they rest upon a group at less than twenty paces distant. It is composed of four persons—Crozier and Carmen Montijo, Cadwallader and Inez Alvarez, standing two and two, *vis-a-vis*.

At the last pair De Lara looks not—the first only claim his attention.

One glance he gives them; another to a pistol holstered on the hip of one of the men guarding him.

A spring, a clutch, and he has possession of it. A bound, and he is off from between the two carelessly conducting him; and runs toward the four who stand apart.

Fortunately for Edward Crozier—for Carmen Montijo as well—there are cries of alarm: shouts of warning, sent by several voices, that reach him together. He turns on hearing them, and sees the approaching danger in time to take steps for arresting it. Simple enough these—the only ones he can think of, only the drawing of his own pistol, and firing at the fiend who advances.

There are two shots, one on each side; though almost simultaneous, one precedes the other by a slight instant of time, enough to decide which must die.

De Lara's pistol cracks last; and as the smoke from it swerves up, the gambler is seen astretch along the sward, red blood spurting out from his breast, and spreading over his shirt.

Harry Blew, rushing up and bending over him, cries out:

"Dead! Shot through the heart—a brave heart, too! What a pity 'twas so black!"

"Come away, *miya querida*," says Crozier to Carmen. "You've had sufficient of the horrible. Let that be the last scene for us. The other we needn't wait to witness."

Taking his betrothed by the hand, he leads her to the boat, Cadwallader with Inez going after. All four seat themselves in the stern-sheets, and wait for the diggers to come down.

They soon appear, conducting their prisoners, the former crew of the Condor, all but four. These they have left behind—a banquet for bald vultures and crested *caracaras*!

CHAPTER LXXXV.

THE SAILOR'S STORY.

THE Chilean barque has rounded Cabo Mala, and is standing for the port of Panama.

With a full crew—most of them able seamen—no fear but that she will reach it now. Crozier in command has restored Harry Blew to his position of first officer, which so far from having, forfeited, he now doubly deserves.

Enfeebled by the long period of privation, the ex-man-o-war's-man is excused from duty, Cadwallader doing it for him. He is strong enough however to tell the two young officers that which they are impatient to hear—the story of the *Specter Barque*. Occupied in attentions to their recovered sweethearts, they have deferred seeking the full explanation, which only the sailor can give them.

Now, on the morning after sailing from Montijo Bay, they demand it. Calling him before them on the quarter-deck, Harry Blew begins:

"Your honors: it's a twisted-up yarn from the start up to the time ye hove in sight; an' if ye hadn't showed up as ye did just in the nick o' time, an' ta'en the twist out o' it, hard to say how 'twould have ended. No doubt in all o' us dyin' on that desert island, an' leavin' our bones there. Thank the Lord for our delivery, without any disparagement to what's been done by yourselves, gentlemen. Sure He must ha' sent you, an' has had a guidin' hand throughout the whole thing. I can't help thinkin' so, when I look back on the scores o' strange chances that seemed goin' against the good, but have sheered round to it after all."

"True," assents Crozier, honoring the devout faith of the sailor; "you are quite right in ascribing it to Divine interference. Certainly, God's hand has been extended in our favor. But go on."

"Well, to begin at the beginnin', which is when you left me in San Francisco. As I told Master Willie that day he comed ashore in the dingy, I war engaged to go chief mate in the Chili barque. She war then a ship; afterward convarted, 'count o' shortness o' hands. When I first went aboard, an'

for some days after, I war myself the only thing in the shape o' a sailor she'd got. Then her captain, that poor crazed creetur below, put advertisements in the papers, offerin' big pay. That, as I then supposed, brought aboard eleven chaps callin' themselves sailors, an' shippin' as such. One o' 'em, for want o' better, war made second mate—his name bein' entered in the books as Padillo. He was the last o' the three swung up, an' if ever a man deserved hangin' he did, being the cussedest scoundrel o' the whole lot. Well, after we'd waited another day or two, an' no more making appearance, the skipper concluded to start. Then the old gentleman along wi' the two saynoreetas came aboard, when we cleared an' stood out to sea. Afore leavin' port, I had a suspishun about the sort o' crew we'd shipped; but soon's we war fairly afloat, it got to be somethin' worse than suspishun. I war sartin then we'd an ugly lot to deal with. Still, at first, I only believed them to be bad men, an' if that war possible, worse sailors. I expected them turnin' mutinous. But on the second night after leavin' land, I found out what proved them somethin' o' a still darker color—that war nothin' more nor less than a set o' piratical conspirators; also that they had a plan ready laid out. A lucky chance led me to discover their infernal scheme. The two we've agreed to let go, by name Jack Striker an' Bill Davis, both old birds from the convict gang o' Australia, war talkin' it over between themselves, an' I chanced to overhear them. What they sayed made everything clear, as it also made my hair stand on end. 'Twar a plot to plunder the ship o' the gold-dust Don Gregorio had got in her, an' carry off the dear girls. At the same time they war to scuttle the vessel an' sink her, first knockin' the old gentleman on the head, as also the skipper, besides sarvin' your humble servant the same way. The cook war to be similarly disposed o'. On listenin' to the dyabolical plot, I war clear dumfounded, an' for a while didn't know what to do. 'Twar a case o' life an' death; the last sartin for some o' us, an' for the saynoreetas somethin' worse. At first I thort o' tellin' Captain Lautanas, an' also Don Gregorio. But then I see'd that if I did it would only make death surer to all o' us as war doomed. I knowed the skipper to be a man o' innocent, unsuspecting natur', an' mightn't believe in such a scheme o' durned rascality bein' possible. More like he'd let out right away, an' bring on the bloody business sooner than they intended. From what Striker an' Davis said, I made out that it war to be kept back till we should sight land somewhere near Panama. After a big spell o' thinkin' I see'd a sort o' long way out o' it—the only way appearin' possible. 'Twar this: to purtend joinin' in wi' the conspirators, an' puttin' myself at their head. I'd larn't from the talk o' the Sydney ducks there war a split 'mong the pirates 'bout the devidin' o' the gold-dust. I see'd this would gi'e me a chance to put in along wi' them. 'Takin' advantage o' it, I broached the bizness to Striker that same night an' got into their councils, afterward obtainin' the influence I wanted. Mind, gentlemen, it took a good deal o' trickery an' maneuverin'. Among other things I had to show hostile to the cabin people all the voyage, 'specially to them two sweet creetur's. Many's the time my heart ached thinkin' o' your sweethearts, an' what might happen to 'em, if I should fail in my plan for protectin' 'em. When they wanted to be free an' friendly, an' would begin talkin' to me, I had to answer 'em gruff and growlin'. For I knowed that eyes war on me all the while, an' ears listenin'.

"As to tellin' 'em what was before, or givin' them the slimmest hint o' it, that would 'a' spoilt everything. In course they'd ha' gone straight to the old gentleman, an' then it 'u'd 'a' been all up wi' us. It war clear that all couldn't be saved. An' that Don Gregorio himself 'u'd have to be sacrificed, as also the skipper and the cook. 'Twar dreadful hard, but thar could be no help for it. I knew I'd have enough on my hands in takin' care o' the weemin, and save them from the scoundrels as wanted to be their ruin. As the Lord has allowed it, in the end all have been saved."

The speaker pauses to take breath. His listeners knowing it is but for this, silently wait for him to continue.

Resuming speech, he says:

"At last, on sightin' land, as agreed on, the day had come for the doin' o' the dark deed. 'Twar after night when we set about it, myself actin' as a sort o' recognized leader. I'd played my part so's to get some control o' the rest. We first lowered a boat, puttin' our things into her. Then we separated, some to lay hands on the gold-dust, others to seize upon the saynoreetas. I let Gomez look after this, for fear o' bringin' on trouble too soon. Me an' Davis, who is a sort o' ship's carpenter, were to do the scuttlin', an' with that purpose went down into the hold. I appealed to him to give the Don and skipper a chance for their lives, an' let the barque float a bit longer. Though he be a Sydney duck, he warn't so bad as some o' the rest. He consented, an' we returned to the deck without tappin' the barque's bottom timbers. Soon's I got my head over the hatch coamin' I see'd they'd all got into the boat, the young ladies along wi' 'em. I didn't know what they'd done to the Don and skipper. I had my fears about 'em; they might ha' knocked 'em on the head as war first proposed. But I daren't go down to the cabin, lest they might shove off an' leave us in the lurch, as some of them war threatenin' to do. If they'd done that—well, it's no use sayin' what would ha' been the end o' all. I see'd it would knock all my plans on the head, an' seein' that, hurried down into the boat. All in, we rowed right away, leavin' the barque just as she'd been the whole o' that day. As we pulled shoreward, we could see her standin' off, all her sail set, same as if she had a full crew attendin' 'em."

"But her ensign reversed—her flag of distress? She was flying it when we came across her. How about that, Harry?"

"Ah! the bit o' buntin' upside down! I did that myself, thinkin' it might gi'e the poor creatur's a better chance o' bein' picked up an' saved. I did it in the dark afore me an' Davis went below, takin' care to let none o' 'em see me."

"And by doing it everything has come right. Leaving it undone, all might have gone the other way. What a strange chance! But surely it has been the hand of God. But for that signal the Crusader might have passed without giving chase, and

instead of our being here, we—but proceed! Tell us all that happened afterward."

"Well, we landed on the island, not knowin' it to be an island. An' there's another o' the chances, showin' we've been took care o' by the cherubs as sits aloft. If 't had been the main land, every thing must ha' turned out different; sure to ha' done so. I'd 'a' protected the girls all the same, or died tryin' to. But for all that I mightn't ha' been able."

"Go on, tell us what happened ashore!"

The young officers are eager to hear the continuance. They have anxious thoughts about what may have occurred in the blank of time not yet covered by the sailor's narrative. The conversation had with their sweethearts has made known some of them; not all. There are points too delicate to have been touched on.

"After landing," resumes the narrator, "we stayed all night on the shore, the men sleepin' in the big cave, the saynoreetas in that you see'd them in. I took care about that myself, determined they should not come to any harm. There war things happened that night which I dare say they've told you, an' 'twar then I first l'arned that Mr. Gil Gomez and Louis Hernandez war no other than two o' the chaps who attacked you in the streets o' San Francisco. No matter for that. Things had to be settled all the same. Mornin' comin' on, we found the boat had gone away from her moorings, and drifted to be broke on the breakers. No matter for that, eyther; we wanted her no more, as we meant to steer inland. Then came the measurin' out o' the gold-dust into shares for all alike. After that, the question as to who should get the girls. It I'd been waitin' for all the time. Mr. Gomez and his pal, Hernandez, war the only two who had special claim to 'em, as I knowed and expected they would. Pretendin' a likin' for Miss Carmen myself, an' puttin' Davis up to do the same for t'other, we two put in our claim. It ended in Gomez an' me goin' for a fight, which must 'a' ended in the death o' one or other. I had no fear about dyin', an' war only vexed at the idea, it might leave the poor girls without protection. Still Davis had give me a promise he'd do the best he could! As there war no help for it, I'd agreed to the duel, which war to be fought first wi' pistols and ended up wi' cutlasses. Every thing settled, we war about pitchin' in when one o' the fellows, who'd gone up the cliff to look ahead, just then sung out tellin' us we'd landed on an island. Recallin' the lost boat, that meant a good deal o' danger, and stopped the fight for a time. When we all got up to the cliff and saw how things stood, there war no more quarrelin'. The piratical scoundrels were all tamed then, an' would ha' been glad to get back aboard the barque we'd abandoned. I confess I war scared like the rest o' 'em, same time havin' some reason to be glad. After that it war all safe, as far as concerned the saynoreetas. To Mr. Gomez and Hernandez they war but a second thought in the face o' sheer starvation, the which soon come upon us, continuin' for ten long days and nights tell we see'd the bark comin' back. I hain't heard your story yet, nor how the Condor is here, wi' yourself o' board o' her. But you've had mine, and now ye know how Harry Blew has behaved, an' how he's kept his word to you in San Francisco."

"Kept your word like a man! Behaved nobly, grandly, in both, as might be expected from an American sailor!"

It is Crozier who speaks, continuing:

"Come to my arms! to my breast, Harry Blew; let me press you! Forgive the suspicions I had, because I could not help them. Here, Cadwallader! Take him to your breast, and show that both are grateful to the man who has done far more for us than if he had saved our own lives. Bless you, Blew, Heaven bless you!"

The midshipman promptly responds to the appeal, and receives Harry Blew from the embrace of the lieutenant, only to hold him in a hug that near threatens his strangulation.

Our story is told. Aught remaining unrevealed, the reader can easily guess; saving the narrator details, that might be extended to a score of chapters.

Epitomized, they give record of the Condor arriving safe in the port of Panama. And there finding the Crusader; of the surprise felt by the frigate's crew, at again beholding a barque which many of them believed to have been a specter.

Later records, bearing date some six months after, speak of an American frigate, called the Crusader, being in the harbor of Cadiz, where two of her officers obtain leave of absence for the purpose of getting united to a pair of Spanish damsels, both noted belles in the old Andalusian city.

No need to say that the bridegrooms in question are Edward Crozier and William Cadwallader, and the brides Carmen Montijo and Inez Alvarez.

In connection with the double wedding is a circumstance deserving record, and which will, no doubt, make the reader happy, as it did both brides and bridegrooms, far more than the splendor of the ceremonial. It is the presence of two men belonging to a barque that lies at anchor in the bay. A barque carrying polacca masts, with the Chilean ensign trailing over her taffrail, on her stern lettered the name, "*El Condor*."

And the two men, who have, for the time, forsaken her to take part in the marriage ceremony in the church of San Ildefonso, are her captain, Don Antonio Lautanas, and her first officer, Harry Blew.

God has been just and good to the gentle Chilean skipper; the cloud, that for a time shadowed his soul, has long since passed away, and he has not only recovered his reason, but remembrance of all the events that led to his temporary loss of it.

He now knows Harry Blew, and all about his noble behavior. He has forgiven him for the act of abandonment, convinced that he could not have done otherwise. On the Condor's deck they are captain and mate, but in the privacy of her cabin all distinction of rank disappears. They are intimate friends, brothers.

Often, as year succeeds year, the Chilean vessel casts anchor in the harbor of Cadiz, the same officers commanding. And in the prosperous trading craft, exchanging rich cargoes—the gold and silver of Chili—for the silks and *Vino de Xeres* of Spain, no one would think of her as having once in the Pacific Ocean been taken for a *SPECTER BARQUE*.

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